



Bill McCormick

8756 S. Escanaba, 1F, Chicago, IL. 60617
Phone: 773.217.5700
E-mail: BillMcSciFi@gmail.com

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Full descriptions of all the chimeras and their lands are in the eleven-page appendix attached after the script.

A RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY IN FRONT OF A NONDESCRIPT OFFICE BUILDING.

v/o

The year was 3550, and smart humans had a dumb idea.

MASSIVE COMPUTER BANKS WITH LOTS OF BLINKING LIGHTS.

v/o

They linked every artificial intelligence in the world into a single entity they named Plato.

A MASS GRAVE WITH BODIES BEING DUMPED INTO IT.

v/o

It went as well as fantabulists had warned. Plato culled thirty percent of the population, to reduce what it considered waste, before humanity realized what they'd wrought.

BOMBS GOING OFF, WIRES BEING CUT, LOTS OF VIOLENCE.

v/o

It took decades, and the resulting war killed billions, but Plato was finally destroyed.

A LARGE WAREHOUSE FILLED WITH HUMAN-SIZED VATS STANDING UPRIGHT. INSIDE EACH VAT IS A GREEN VISCOUS LIQUID AND SILHOUETTES OF HUMANOID CHIMERAS. THERE SHOULD BE SUCCUBI, WOLFEN, BADGEBETH, MINOTAURS, AND OTHERS. LARGER VATS CONTAIN LLAMIA, THE CENTAUR/ARMADILLO MIX. WE SEE SCIENTISTS, WEARING MONOGRAMMED ELECTRIC PINK LAB COATS, TENDING TO THE VATS.

v/o

A thousand or so years later, Edward Q. Rohta was born. A brilliant geneticist, and avowed hedonist, he circumvented draconian anti-AI laws by creating chimeras based on, but not limited to, the human genome.

(MORE)

These chimeras became the gold standard when people wanted sex slaves, manual labor, or disposable armies.

SCIENTISTS DRAINING VATS, OPENING THEM, AND YANKING VARIOUS CHIMERAS OUT.

V/O

Rohta had discovered the trick to making transgenic beings, and thus having them certified as property, was to create them with fifty-two chromosomes instead of the usual forty-six. Legally they were listed as pseudo-humans and granted no rights.

LOCATION: CENTRAL AFRICA. THERE IS AN OPULENT ESTATE CARVED INTO THE JUNGLE. THE MAIN MANSION IS WHITE, AND THE SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE IS OBSESSIVELY MANICURED. THERE IS A PARTY BEING ARRANGED. LARGE TABLES LADEN WITH NUMEROUS DELICACIES AND SEVERAL BARS SURROUNDING THE PERIMETER ARE STOCKED WITH BOOZE.

An olive-backed forest robin leaps from its perch, chirping happily. A Fox Kestrel hears the song and swoops down from on high, snags the robin and kills it, splashing blood into the air. It begins eating the tasty delicacy as it flies into the African dawn.

A server, wearing all white, outside near a table, tosses away a napkin with blood drops on it and then continues wrapping silverware.

A WHITE MANSION. A YARD WITH TABLES SET AROUND THE PERIMETER. STAFF PLACED FOOD TRAYS ON THEM. MUSICIANS ARE SETTING UP NEAR THE BASE BUT OFF TO ONE SIDE OF THE STAIRCASE. THERE IS A SWIMMING POOL, OLYMPIC-SIZED, NEAR THE BASE OF THE STAIRCASE. THE YARD ENVELOPES THREE SIDES OF THE POOL, WITH THE FOURTH SIDE OPEN TO THE MANSION.

AT DUSK, THERE IS A PARTY OUTSIDE THE MANSION, BUFFET-STYLE ARRANGEMENT. NUDE WAITERS AND WAITRESSES SERVE DRINKS AND APPETIZERS. THE CROWD IS DRESSED IN A WIDE VARIETY OF FINERY, AND MOST IGNORE THE SERVERS. SOME OF THE GUESTS ARE FROLICKING IN THE POOL. SOME ARE NAKED; OTHERS ARE NOT. A SMALL GROUP OF MUSICIANS PLAYS A SLOWED-DOWN VERSION OF TURKISH CLASSICAL MUSIC IN THE BACKGROUND.

SAMPLE TURKISH CLASSICAL - [HTTPS://KAITLINBOVE.COM/TURKISH-CLASSICAL-MUSIC](https://kaitlinbove.com/turkish-classical-music)

Musicians play a brief fanfare.

V/O

But, before Rohta could flood the world with chimeras, radically alter evolution, and kickstart the apocalypse, he needed the support of the rich and gullible. To garner that he threw a party. Specifically, this party.

ROHTA'S AIDE. A YOUNG WOMAN, WEARING NOTHING BUT A BRIGHTLY COLORED STOLE AND HEELS

AIDE

Members of the conglomerate, people of the electorate, welcome. Your munificent host, Edward Q. Rohta, thanks you for attending. In keeping with the traditional protocols, the Sanchaar Virodhee net has been activated, and all communications or broadcasts are now prohibited. As mentioned in the invitation, Mr. Rohta is accepting applications for both husband and wife positions to add to his coterie. Now, if you will, please welcome your host.

EDWARD Q. ROHTA IS A 6' TALL, DARK-SKINNED MAN OF AFRICAN HERITAGE, WELL PROPORTIONED (I.E., HUNG LIKE A RODEO PONY), WEARING A SEE-THROUGH GOWN AND SANDALS (NOTHING ELSE).

To his right stand two women and one man, and on his left are two men and one woman. All six are similarly nude under their diaphanous robes.

As they descend the stairs, an employee pushes a purple cart out and brings it up next to the pool.

Rohta's aide opens the top, and two creatures climb out.

Resembling seals, both are barely five feet tall, have mottled gray skin, small muzzles with whiskers, thin lips, oblong bodies, visible webbing on their hands and feet, and are wearing swim trunks.

They both stretch and dive into the pool. They begin swimming underwater laps. Rohta's aide holds up a clock, counting up seconds. At the ten-minute mark, the two creatures emerge above water.

One of the creatures asks the aide for a towel. A few people gasp. A couple of others faint.

Rohta steps forward from the bottom of the stairs and spreads his arms. The creatures stand on either side of him.

ROHTA

Behold the first generation of gen-O-pods, all aspects and genetic traits trademarked by and to Rohta Industries, LLC Humans no longer have to bemoan the loss of the artificial minds and mechanical beings that used to do our bidding. Due to their six extra chromosomes, these gen-O-pods are legally non-human.

Behind Rohta holographic images of various chimera appear. The audience is paying rapt attention.

ROHTA

They are, however, capable of rudimentary speech, so you can give and confirm commands. They will do any labor you need, in any environment required, and are easily replaceable should you accidentally lose or destroy one. Military and commercial variants are clearly marked. All gen-O-pods can also be used for your personal pleasure should you so desire. Since they are all sterile, there are no uncomfortable issues. Pricing and guarantees are included in the brochure. We begin taking orders immediately.

The nude servants pass out brochures.

The brochures include photos of the various gen-O-pods currently in production and drawings of proposed iterations. A crowd surrounds Rohta while his aide takes orders on a digital tablet. Some people point to specific images in the brochure, and Rohta nods and answers their questions.

Rohta, holding a brochure, speaking to a small group.

ROHTA

(MORE)

There's nothing to worry about. Besides being sterile, the pods are loaded with bio-bombs that terminate their employment after ten years. Replacements and upgrades are reasonably priced.

Rohta, talking to a group of military looking people.

ROHTA

Think of it. No more wasted human life. All your armies can be gen-O-pods. They're cheaper than weapons and easier to replace. Any custom work you may require can be discussed. Any training that's required can be edited into their memories before they're decanted. You'll have the best trained military the world's ever seen for a fraction of the cost with a complete removal of human risk.

A traditional boardroom party, with Edward, next to his aide who is dressed as before, and twenty or thirty others dressed for business, all standing under a banner reading **ROHTA LLC SETS RECORD PROFITS!**

A ROW OF CAGES, EACH WITH A WOLFEN INSIDE.

Humans walk past, scooping kibble into dishes and sliding one dish at a time into each cage as they walk by. Some bang the cages and make fun of the creatures.

ROWS OF MILITARY BARRACKS.

A small group of Badgebeth is being whipped mercilessly outside a barrack by a group of belligerent humans who are also yelling at them.

INTERIOR LARGE BEDROOM.

A succubus is standing nude in front of a portly, middle-aged man. He motions for her to spin. She complies and transforms into a beautiful young human female, although she still has succubus talons for feet.

He looks her up and down, frowns, and makes the twirling motion again. She twirls and transforms into a handsome young human male with succubus talons for feet.

The middle-aged man smiles, letting a small amount of drool run down his chin, and begins stripping as he walks across the room towards the succubus, motioning towards his groin as he approaches. The succubus, whimpering, kneels.

A LUXURIOUS YACHT.

Rohta is standing on the deck with his wives and husbands, drinking champagne. His aide, dressed as usual, is standing next to him, entering information into a tablet. A screen covering the entrance to the cabins reads, in large letters, **CHI/RUS WELCOMES ROHTA LLC**

A BATTLEFIELD.

One large group of gen-O-pods in blue uniforms are firing weapons at another group of gen-O-pods wearing yellow uniforms, who are firing back.

A COMMAND CENTER WITH A TABLETOP SCREEN SHOWING BLUE AND YELLOW 3D TRIANGLES IN VARIOUS FORMATIONS.

A group of humans wearing blue are seated and standing across the table from a group of humans wearing yellow, and they all have drinks and are smiling.

SAME BATTLEFIELD. THERE ARE GEN-O-POD BODIES EVERYWHERE.

INTERIOR OF A CAVE.

A Llamia is leading a Badgebeth into a large cavern. We see silhouettes of other gen-O-pods but no specific details.

A small battalion of gen-O-pods is doing weapons training in a cave.

AN UNDERGROUND CHAMBER.

Various gen-O-pods study battle tactics that a Llamia teaches on a large screen.

AN EMPTY CANYON.

Succubi practice carrying small bombs and weapons in flight.

ROHTA'S LAB. VARIOUS SCREENS SHOW D.N.A. SEQUENCING, STOCK TICKERS, AND A GAME OF PYRAMID SOLITAIRE.

Rohta, now a senior citizen with gray hair and wrinkles, is sitting alone.

An elderly succubus walks in with two young succubi holding her hands. She has a light yet raspy voice. She is wearing nothing but a loincloth and is carrying an automatic rifle slung over her shoulder.

SUCCUBUS

Hello, Rohta. I think you know that enough is most certainly enough. You have done more damage in one lifetime than any of the many gods you humans prattle on about. We brands have studied as much as we could of you and your kind and find that it gets in the way of decent creatures such as us. Ergo, you've left us no choice. Humanity has to go. Farewell, Rohta. I hope it was worth it.

She leads the youngsters out of Rohta's lab.

Rohta is looking at some monitors. Scenes of various Rohta facilities being put to the torch and all the employees being killed by armed gen-O-pods.

Rohta's crying.

Rohta is lying dead on the floor, a couple of his spouses crying around him. An empty vial of pills is still in his hand. A note is pinned to his chest. All that can be made out is **"TO THE UNFORTUNATES WHO FIND THIS"**

A CITY STREET IN FLAMES. BODIES EVERYWHERE.

V/O

Instead of dying every ten years, as promised in the brochure, the gen-O-pods would develop something they called "the ten-year flu" and then disappear. Clients thought Rohta's team was collecting the bodies, and Rohta's team thought clients were disposing of them like traditional waste.

A group of blue-skinned gen-O-pods, intermixed male, and female, all bald, walking and bending metal, crushing vehicles, pulling supports out of buildings causing them to collapse, and tossing large metal objects onto groups of humans, killing them immediately. Surviving humans screaming and running away.

FUNERAL PYRES OF DEAD HUMANS.

Mixed gen-o-pods tossing bodies into the pyres.

AN OCEAN.

Succubi flying, dropping bombs on human ships, and gunning down any human they can see.

Ships sinking and survivors being gunned down by gen-O-pods in boats and armed succubi swooping down from above.

CITIES IN FLAMES.

A mixed group of gen-O-pods walking through a city using flame throwers to torch everything.

A WELL-MANICURED SUBURBAN LAWN SURROUNDED BY BOMBED-OUT, SMOLDERING, HOMES.

Two heavily armed wolfen are hunched down, eating bag lunches, surrounded by dead humans.

WOLFEN #1

You'd think, with all their knowledge, they'd have seen this coming.

The portly human who'd abused the succubus earlier is whimpering and trying to crawl away. The second wolfen smiles, fires a single shot into the ack of portly human's skull, killing him instantly, and returns to the conversation.

WOLFEN #2

Yeah, apocalypses are funny that way.

FADE TO BLACK.

A SANDY PATCH OF LAND. TREES FAR IN THE DISTANCE. THE SKY IS CLEAR.

Loud, aggressive tribal music playing.

R'YUNE. A WOLFEN. HE IS WEARING DENIM-STYLE PANTS, A VEST, AND A WEAPONS BELT. HE IS BAREFOOT AND HAS LARGE PAWS.

A rakyen is running as fast as it can. It's being chased by a sword wielding R'yune.

R'yune catches up with the rakyen and beheads it without breaking stride.

N'LEAH, A 6' TALL BLACK AND BALD SUCCUBUS, LANDS. SHE IS WEARING A LOINCLOTH AND A WEAPONS BELT.

R'yune is skinning the rakyen.

N'leah kneels, cups her hands, and nurses a blue flame from the sands.

As they begin to eat, a silver orb floats into view. It emanates a low electronic hum mixed with distant tinkling noises.

v/o

Time passed, and the brands made the world their own. They renamed the Earth Arreti, eliminated miles and kilometers, and created the more accurate measurement, kays.

They stare at the orb for a minute, R'yune throws his slab of meat in the fire, and they both stand and follow the orb.

A DESOLATE LANDSCAPE. SPARSE VEGETATION, MOSTLY STUNTED. THERE IS A TAR PIT WITH A CARCASS OF A DEAD MUTANT ANIMAL STICKING OUT OF IT. CARRION BIRDS ARE ATTACKING IT.

SLAND, A 5'5" BADGEBETH, WEARING WORK PANTS, A VEST, AND TWO WEAPONS BELTS AND CARRYING A SWORD. HE IS BAREFOOT.

Sland is shooing the carrion birds as he cuts off some of the dead animal's flesh.

He sits and chews on the raw meat when a silver orb appears. It is making a low electronic hum mixed with distant tinkling noises.

V/O

Children are now called smalls.
Hours and their ilk were replaced
with cliks, epi-cliks, and sepi-
cliks, as appropriate.

Sland tosses his meal aside, stands, and follows the orb.

A SINGLE STORY HOME, ITS PALE EXTERIOR IS MADE UP OF PULSING VEINS, WHICH REVEAL A SUBSTANCE SIMILAR TO BLOOD PASSING THROUGH THEM. THE VEGETATION SURROUNDING IT IS HEALTHIER THAN ANY WE'VE SEEN SO FAR, BUT FAR FROM VERDANT.

V/O

The age of man, for all its
promise, had finally become a myth
long forgotten

BRAARB, A LLAMIA

BraarB is in front of the building, teasing a silver orb with her bullwhip.

GELDISH, A 4'5" RANGKA, WEARING A
BLACK ROBE.

Geldish walks out of the building.

BraarB coils the whip around her waist and flips Geldish up on her back.

He is holding her mane as they ride off.

A SMALL DIVE BAR, MILDLY CROWDED WITH, AND RUN BY, HAVEN LORDS

N'leah and R'yune enter. She spins a chair around so it doesn't tangle her wings, and they sit.

Sland follows, looks around, sits at their table, and raises three fingers.

SLAND

A round of skank for us.
(Loud)

The haven lord, clearly afraid of them, delivers three flagons of skank. They do not pay for them.

N'leah steals his bar rag and begins wiping sweat and dew from her breasts.

Geldish and BraarB enter. He raises two fingers and joins the other three.

N'leah hands BraarB the rag, and she begins drying herself as well.

The bartender delivers two more flagons of skank for Geldish and BraarB, then scurries away.

SLAND

Speak, you fucking sack of bones. I have traveled many kays to be here. Why have you summoned us? And for what reason?

N'leah turns to face Geldish.

N' LEAH

What he lacks in subtlety, he makes up for in truth. Why are we here?

Geldish considers the question.

The flames in his eyes begin to crawl onto his brow. Slowly they recede, and he hisses.

GELDISH

To kill Xhaknar's army, bring water to Go-Chi, and make many goldens.

Most of their skank ends up on the floor, either from oral and nasal projection or dropped flagons.

Seeing what happened, the innkeeper runs over with a new round of drinks.

Everyone finishes their drink in one gulp except Geldish, who is sipping.

BRAARB

Well, okay, anything else?

Geldish grins.

GELDISH

Well, it seems we could do with more skank.

Geldish waves to the innkeeper again.

The frazzled brand returns with five more flagons of skank.

Braarb hands the innkeeper his rag.

He runs away.

SLAND

I'm sorry, dead one, this is crazy talk.

Geldish turns and devotes his full attention to Sland.

GELDISH

Are you pleased with Xhaknar's reign?

SLAND

No.

Geldish's voice grows darker.

GELDISH

Do you dislike goldens?

SLAND

No.

GELDISH

Do you prefer pit food to real food?

SLAND

No.

GELDISH

Well, then, you are with me.

BraarB snorts.

BraarB

You are smooth, dead one, but what you ask is impossible.

GELDISH

Why?

BraarB is slack jawed.

BraarB

Great Rohta! Because Xhaknar has built an army of over five hundred thousand well-trained Naradhama over these last five hundred Suns, and they are at his disposal and ... well, what the Zanubi more do you need?

Geldish smiles.

GELDISH

Well, we'll need an army, obviously.

Geldish sips his skank and continues.

GELDISH

There? You see? It's simple if you work out the details.

N'leah cocks her drink to throw it at him, then sets it back down. She takes a deep breath and doesn't even try to hide her sarcasm.

N' LEAH

None of us could have thought of that! Shall I hail a crier to summon our army, or do we just post a notice?

Geldish whispers in a voice that could curl iron.

GELDISH

Neither will be necessary. Our army will come when we offer them the goldens we are going to get.

BraarB looks beaten.

BRAARB

And are those goldens we will be seeing soon?

GELDISH

Yes, this even, at moons full or even-split ... whichever is easier.

Sland looks at everyone and shrugs.

SLAND

How much, and where?

Geldish sips some of his skank and then replies.

GELDISH

Three million goldens, presently located in Xhaknar's repository.

Sland stares at him.

SLAND

Unless I'm an ass eater, that repository is not open now.

GELDISH

I know.

They exchange looks. They all know that action like this will get them thirty turns on Xhaknar's blood fountain, and then they'll be killed.

N'leah taps R'yune on the shoulder.

N' LEAH

Well, how about it, partner? Do you need more than a sepi-clik to decide if you'll let Xhaknar put another price on your head for the chance to zork him off and maybe kill him?

R'yune growls his approval.

BraarB sums it up.

BRAARB

We have all killed for less.

(MORE)

I think it is safe to say we are
with you. We just don't know why.

Geldish nods, orders another round of skank, and snags a bowl of meat from the hands of the now trembling innkeeper. Then he hands the whimpering server a sack containing enough goldens to keep him in bar rags for eternity.

GELDISH

Even-split it is, then.

A SMALL FARM, WELL KEMPT. MOSTLY WHEAT. SOME KGUM CAN BE SEEN IN A NEARBY, FENCED IN PASTURE.

OOLNOK - A SE-JEANT WEARING A STRAW
HAT

Oolnok is looking across his fields and sighing. He is alone.

OOLNOK

Be a nice farm if well enough could be left alone. But such seems doomed never to happen. Between the various raiding parties, the taxes, and the fact there seems to be less and less water every Sun, we barely eke out enough to survive.

He glances down and curses softly to himself. He is surprised by his wife, also a Se-Jeant, behind him.

WIFE

Don't let the smalls hear you use language like that.

He chuckles and scrapes the kgum dung off his boots and heads to the coops for his prancing fowls.

His wife is walking beside him.

WIFE

And you know Xhaknar hears all, knows all. Wouldn't want him to think old Oolnok was a foul mouthed rebel, would we?

OOLNOK

Let him hear. He'll hear old Oolnok kee3ps his eyes clean and his farm working. He'll hear old Oolnok pays his taxes and starts no trouble.

He scatters feed across the ground for the prancing fowls.

WIFE

You're a good brand Oolnok. Always took care of me and mine.

(MORE)

Ever since we were first joined
under the Parson's tree, my life
has been better.

Oolnok smiles.

OOLNOK

Ever since I saw your smile when
our elders matched us, I knew I
wanted to see it every turn I
breathed.

Wife smiles back at him, then turns serious.

WIFE

Some of the femmes at the smalls'
school have been talking.

OOLNOK

That's never good.

They walk over to slop the na-porcines.

WIFE

Maybe yes, maybe no. Some are
saying the Eastern Warrens are safe
and they are thinking of moving
there.

The sound of small's laughter from the house.

OOLNOK

All that we are is here. All that
we have is here. Everyone who ever
loved us is here. All that our
smalls know is here. We are here.
Xhaknar is there. The wars, the
cullings, those are there. As long
as we pay our taxes and keep our
eyes clean, no harm can come our
way.

WIFE

I suppose you're right. You're
always right. I'm going to leave
you now. I've got to make sure the
smalls are ready for our even-fall
meal.

She kisses Oolnok on the cheek and leaves.

Oolnok walking across the farm to the kgum pens, muttering to
himself.

OOLNOK

Old Oolnok don't care what others
think, life under Xhaknar is just
fine as long as you obey the rules.

(MORE)

And since the rules are posted in every public gathering space, there's no excuse for forgetting them.

Oolnok heads to the side gate and releases the kgums into the field.

He pats one of the kgums as it saunters by.

OOLNOK

Good fur this Sun. We'll make some solid goldens at market come the Dim-Sun.

A MILITARY CAMP MANNED BY NARADHAMA AND MAYANOREN SOLDIERS. THERE ARE A FEW WAGONS ON THE PERIMETER COVERED IN OBSCENE IMAGES. COOKING FIRES ARE SCATTERED THROUGHOUT. A VIEW THROUGH THE CAMP REVEALS SOME SHARPENING WEAPONS OR BEING SERVICED BY THE PROSTITUTES WHO CAME IN THE WAGONS.

EK-KH, A MINOTAUR, GAUDILYDRESSED WITH ASSLESS CHAPS AND A LOINSHIELD.

A CARAVAN OF EROTIC ENTERTAINERS, BOTH MAYANOREN AND NARADHAMA, ARE FELLATING, AND CAVORTING WITH, THE TROOPS.

Ek-kh is hanging over the shoulder of nude, female, Naradhama.

EK-KH

This is how it should be. Since there are mal and femme warriors, there are mal and femme temp-slaves. At least those who were unsure Xhaknar killed a long time ago.

Ek-kh is staggering through the camp, clutching a bottle of booze and exulting loudly.

EK-KH

ALL HAIL ME, NEWLY LOYAL LEADER OF THE NARADHAMA!

All of the soldiers ignore him.

Ek-kh grabs a Naradhama prostitute from between the thighs of a Mayanoren soldier she's fellating and drags her towards his tent.

He enters his tent, gasps/shrieks, and throws the slave outside.

He collapses to his knees, whimpering.

XHAKNAR. AN EIGHT-FOOT-TALL SUPER-SOLDIER. HE HAS NO HAIR, IS HEAVILY MUSCLED, AND IS WEARING A DARK GREEN UNIFORM WITH NO EMBLEMS OR INSIGNIA.

Ek-kh is shrieking.

EK-KH

Great one! You were not expected for three more turns.

XHAKNAR

But I am here now. Not one sepi-lik too soon, it would seem.

Ek-kh staggers drunkenly to his hooves.

EK-KH

Our scouts have attained the information you sought.

XHAKNAR

Will you share it with me, or shall I rip it from your decadent, yet useless soul?

Ek-kh is too drunk to lie. He is trembling from head to hoof.

EK-KH

Oh no, Great One! Ummhh, Geldish is on the move. Uhh, he has been sighted in the Crasnia ... the new haven bar in Go-Chi. Uhh, you know? Uhh, yes, umm, he has four fringe dwellers with him!

XHAKNAR

There are no warriors?

Ek-kh is shaking.

EK-KH

Oh no, Great One!

XHAKNAR

No traitors?

Ek-kh screeching..

EK-KH

No, Great One!

Xhaknar, tight smile.

XHAKNAR

Just four fringe dwellers?

Ek-kh trembling.

EK-KH

Yes, Great One!!

Khaknar slowly pours himself a flagon of Whævin from a jug.

XHAKNAR

I see. What were they doing, Ek-kh?

EK-KH

Drinking skank and eating meat,
Great One.

XHAKNAR

Why?

(Drag it out in an evil
voice)

XHAKNAR

Tell me Ek-kh, newly loyal leader
of Naradhama. Tell me, Ek-kh, he
whose blood may yet fill my
fountain. Tell me why they were
drinking skank and eating meat in a
haven bar in Go-Chi.

Behind his dwellers' loin shield, rivulets of urine begin to
cascade down to the ground.

Ek-kh crashes to his knees amidst his newly created lake,
cracking his jaw against the temp-slave serving cart and
causing his lip to bleed.

EK-KH

I do not know, Great One! That
knowledge is beyond me!

XHAKNAR

How will you attain that which I
seek?

Ek-kh continues to debase himself.

EK-KH

I have left a spy in the Crasnia,
Great One.

Khaknar harumphs.

XHAKNAR

Were any of the fringe dwellers
hunters?

Ek-kh's voice is almost flanging.

EK-KH

Yes, Great One! A BadgeBeth and a
Wolfen!

XHAKNAR

Was there a Succubus with the
Wolfen?

EK-KH

Yes, Great One!

XHAKNAR

You may live, but first ... you
have one klik to lick up your mess.

Ek-kh leaving Xhaknar's tent. His mouth is covered with mud, blood, and piss. He runs screaming through the camp.

EK-KH

All can live! All can live!

The assembled ranks of the Naradhama and the Mayanoren either ignore him or offer up a half-hearted huzzah.

A Naradhama soldier winces as Ek-kh passes. He turns to a Mayanoren drinking from a bottle of booze.

NARADHAMA SOLDIER

I guess that's good news. He is, after all, the newly loyal leader of the Naradhama.

MAYANOREN

No matter what the Naradhama say.

They both laugh as the Mayanoren hands the bottle to the Naradhama.

OUR TITULAR HEROES ARE IN AN ALLEY BEHIND A NONDESCRIBT BUILDING. THERE ARE A FEW DEAD GUARDS SCATTERED AROUND THEM.

BraarB is walking near the rear of the repository, feeling the wall. She stops and points to a section.

BraarB

Here, there's no support behind it.

R'yune punches through the brick and mortar. He quickly rips out a Llamia size piece of the wall and tosses the loose bricks in a pile.

GELDISH

We have ten epi-cliks to get done and gone.

Sland nods and runs in. Soon bags of goldens start flying out. After a few moments, there is a muffled shout from inside.

N'leah darts inside. She sees two Mayanoren attempting to grab Sland, who is holding them at bay with knife swipes and unforeseen agility.

N'leah flies/dives at one Mayanoren, swinging around him and slicing his throat as she passes.

Before Sland can react, she drives her knife through the second creature's jowls and twists the blade so it severs its spine.

Outside, the others wait tensely. They hear the noises cease.

Suddenly a dead, shirtless, Mayanoren comes flying through the opening. Quickly followed by another whose shirt is torn.

SLAND V/O

Time to play catch!
(Yelling)

Bags of goldens begin sailing through the portal, and R'yune grabs each of them and then places and secures them on BraarB's back.

When the bags stop, N'leah walks out, wiping blood from her hands on what appears to be a uniform shirt. Sland follows.

R'yune finishes loading the bags on BraarB's back.

BraarB begins a slow walk southwest. R'yune and Sland flank her. N'leah takes to the air just above them.

Geldish nods and motions for them to continue without him.

GELDISH

I'll be less than a clik behind
you. Go!

He looks at the mess in front of him and sighs. He waves his hand at the bodies. They float/dance back into the repository.

Then he looks at the bricks. They re-wall themselves quickly.

Geldish stares at the wall and draws the letter 'G' in the brick face with his finger. The letter seems to glow and pulse to a rhythm all its own.

As he stands to ponder something, he hears screams.

OFFSCREEN VOICES

Help! Enforcers, Naradhama,
Mayanoren. Help. Our master's been
robbed!

Geldish smiles and literally melts into the sand.

BROKEN, CRACKED SOIL, WITH FUMES EMANATING FROM IT. PLANTS CAN BE SEEN OCCASIONALLY.

The four new allies are walking in tight formation, surrounded by the mist. About half a kay behind them, a Mayanoren is riding a deisteed.

Every time the Mayanoren tries to traverse the mist, his deisteed balks.

Finally, agitated, he dismounts and steps into the mist.

He jumps back screaming. The soles of his feet are smoking, and his boots are ruined.

He watches, frustrated, as the thieves disappear into the growing mists.

INSIDE XHAKNAR'S TENT.

Khaknar is holding the Mayanoren soldier off the ground by his throat.

XHAKNAR

THEY DID WHAT?!?!

The Mayanoren makes a gurgling noise, and Xhaknar tosses him across the tent.

The Mayanoren is bleeding and gasping for air.

XHAKNAR

Geldish has no more need for goldens than I do. Why in the name of all that grows would he ...

He bends down, tosses the Mayanoren out of his tent, pours himself a goblet full of Whævin, and sits.

XHAKNAR

A demonstration. That's all it can be. But of what and why? I will find out if I have to kill every spy I have.

IN THE CAMP, THERE ARE NUDE MAYANOREN AND NARADHAMA LURIDLY DANCING AROUND THE TROOPS. THE BLOODY MAYANOREN PUSHES THROUGH THEM UNTIL HE CAN GRAB A FLAGON OF ALCOHOL.

OOLNOK'S FARM

Oolnok is plowing his south field when he sees the tax collector coming.

The tax collector, a big Mayanoren of limited intellect, walks across the field heedless of his path.

OOLNOK

Greetings Tax Collector. What brings you by this turn? It is not your season yet.

TAX COLLECTOR

Greetings Oolnok, you will be pleased to know Lord Xhaknar has decided to raise taxes in the villages by one percent.

(MORE)

You will be pleased to know this because he's raising them in the warrens by three percent. Now you have been told; there will be no excuse for an underpayment.

The tax collector stalks back across the field and onto the road.

Oolnok's wife approaches.

WIFE

What was the tax collector doing here?

OOLNOK

Khaknar's raising taxes in the villages by one percent. Which is better than in the warrens where they will go up three percent.

WIFE

That's good news, I guess.

OOLNOK

One percent is truly better than three, and we'd had good sales at the warren when we'd sold his stock of kgum hair.

WIFE

You always get the best deals at market.

Oolnok chuckles.

OOLNOK

Many herders don't take the extra time to wash all the hair once it's sheared. But you discovered we could get almost double the price in the end. Yes, it was tedious work, but that's what have the smalls for.

WIFE

Well, what they lack in actually helping, they make up for in enthusiasm. Anyway, they've been good in school and they do help around here as much as they can. I'd like to take them to the puppet show when we next go to market.

Oolnok nods.

OOLNOK

That's good family entertainment. I think it's just a coincidence that the puppet of the Prince of Power and Purity looks just like Khaknar.

They walk back towards the house.

BROKEN, CRACKED SOIL, WITH FUMES EMANATING FROM IT. PLANTS CAN BE SEEN OCCAIONALLY.

Our titular heroes, minus Geldish, walk across the wasteland as the sun rises. A roiling mist follows them. Only a tiny part of that mist touches their feet or hooves. The rest forms a wall behind them.

R'yune and Sland still flank BraarB. They keep up a consistent trot despite being well clear of Go-Chi.

N'leah flies just above them.

Eventually, Sland motions for them to halt. The air is cool, but the morning sun is harsh. They pass around canteens.

Sland swallows some water.

SLAND

I don't fucking get it. Geldish set up the perfect plan and then let us walk away with over three million fucking goldens. Why?

BRAARB

Because this is what he wanted to do.

N'leah swings around and lands near BraarB. She takes a swig from the proffered canteen, wipes her dry lips, and plops down on the sand.

N' LEAH

You act as though you fear him. Why is that?

BraarB settles next to her.

BRAARB

Do you remember Yontar?

N'leah shivers.

N' LEAH

Yea...

(The word trembles from her gut like hot bile)

BraarB accepts a canteen from N'leah and wets her mouth.

BRAARB

You need to say no more. Your brand was thinned for the 'good of Arreti' too, I see. Geldish is the Rangka who killed him.

Vacant gazes emanate from the faces around her.

N' LEAH

All the stories we've heard say there was a great and noble battle. Everybody fought, and everybody died. Neat, clean, and pleasantly legendary.

BrarB nods.

BRAARB

That's the official version. It's untrue, and if the brands find out that Geldish is the rogue Rangka from the story, there will be one Zanubi of a war. It would mean super soldiers like Xhaknar can be killed. Of course, conversely, that opens up the possibility that Yontar may be less severely dead than previously rumored.

R'yune grunts loudly, shaking his head, pulls a jug from his kit and opens it.

SLAND

Whævin! Good idea!

The rest of the team puts away their water and pass the potation around.

N'leah lies against BraarB's flank and tries to make herself comfortable.

She fails, so she changes into her womyn form.

That unnerves Sland.

SLAND

No offense, N'leah, but how useful is it to look like a maker when all brands have ever done is kill makers?

N'leah laughs. It is a gentle, warm sound.

N' LEAH

You're right, but it's how we were made and, to be honest, it's kind of a comfortable body if no one else is around.

That gets a laugh from everyone.

Finally, everyone quiets down and stares at Braarb.

N' LEAH

So, is Yontar dead? If we're taking on Xhaknar and he's still around, we're in serious trouble.

(MORE)

We'll be dead in some cheap sepi-
cliks if he's still here.

BraarB nods, sips some more Wahevin, and continues.

BRAARB

I was there. I saw the whole
battle, if you could call it that.
I, too, have heard the lies spewed
forth from the foul orifices of
Anapsida. I have heard how an
unnamed Rangka died at the hands of
a courageous Yontar, who fell
protecting the good of Arreti.

She sips some more Whævin.

BRAARB

But Geldish is still among the
living, if that's the right term,
and Yontar is truly gone. I can
assure you there was no great,
vainglorious, or epic war. There
was no tremendous battle; there was
nothing like that at all. They just
stood on the field near Anapsida
and stared at each other for thirty
turns. Through rain and howling
winds, neither moved. Then, Yontar
fell. Just like that, he was dead.
Smoke pouring from his rotten eyes.
I did not mourn his passing.

YONTAR - ANOTHER SUPER SOLDIER.

FLASHBACK: Yontar lying on the ground, smoke pouring from his
eyes.

Khaknar screaming.

Naradhama panicking. Some running to Yontar, others circling
Khaknar to protect him.

Braarb yanking Geldish onto her back and galloping away.

She takes a long pull from the flask this time.

BRAARB

Anyway, Khaknar saw the whole thing
and flew into a colossal rage. I
was standing behind Geldish. I
grabbed him and helped carry him
back to his lair before the
Naradhama could figure out they if
were supposed to follow us... and
kill him.

(MORE)

I kept my tongue until now because
I did not wish to be hunted like a
fattened kgum.

N'leah drinks some more Whævin.

Sland seems to be considering the whole thing one syllable at a time. He keeps scratching his head and shifting on his haunches.

R'yune is content to drink Whævin. Nothing seems to faze him.

N'leah reverts to her succubus form.

N'LEAH

The battle was just over one Full Sun ago. It's hard for me to believe reality could be so different from the rumors. If the story you told is true, and I believe you, it means Geldish is more than a Rangka; he's an astral warrior. That would put a whole new spin on what we just did. As far as any brand like us knows, astral warriors don't need goldens. So why did we rob the repository? For that matter, why would Geldish need us or the goldens at all?

Sland seems concerned and confused.

SLAND

Demon brand?

The sand bubbles around them. Foul-smelling embers crash around their feet. Smoke wafts from the gaping hole. They appear to be witnessing the bowels of Arreti expunging themselves.

Geldish appears.

GELDISH

You queried?

SLAND

Is the asshole really dead?

Geldish turns his full attention to the BadgeBeth.

GELDISH

Which asshole?

Sland shifts uncomfortably beneath the dead gaze of Geldish's flames.

SLAND

Yontar.

This next scene is a VFX Specialist's wet dream. Since this film is already R rated, and a large part of this scene is dialogue free, I expect some amazing showreels to be born.

The flames in Geldish's eye sockets extend and embrace Sland's head.

They caress him deep into the folds of the thing Geldish calls a mind.

The flames twist Sland's body and soul into shapes he never imagined.

This is place without aplace. These sounds without noise. This isthe color nine.

Sland is inside Geldish, somehow, somewhere.

He watches as a million stars melt and die.

The things near them decay.

He watches as his breath takes form and strangles the cosmos.

He listens as faces appear, wailing and moaning. They appear to suffer the kind of pain that makes death seem like a vacation.

The faces peel away from the undulating bone they were attached to.

They reveal angry insects that cannot flee. Each face distorts terribly and then withers.

From behind the dying agonies, a thousand demon warriors appear. Their swords and knives are aimed right at Sland's heart.

He wants to scream; he wants to die; he wants to leave. He can do none of those things.

The warriors rush, headlong, at him. He feels the swords as they penetrate this flesh, but he sees no wounds. The demon warriors pass through him and fade from view.

While he's still getting his bearings, clouds of blood form on the horizon.

As he nears them, he can see three great beasts have been gutted. Their size does not diminish as he gets a better view of them. Their twitching bodies squirm under an impossibly bent moon.

The beasts are larger than one hundred BadgeBeth. They scream like newborn smalls.

Suddenly the blood clouds pop him free.

He shoots to a new horizon at ludicrous speeds.

He just plummets outward.

He is plunged into a curtain of glass shards.

Again, there are no cuts.

He cries out as he can feel the pain but still sees no scars.

Then, as eerily as it began, it stops.

YONTAR, NOW A LITTLE RAT-LIKE
CREATURE.

Yontar looks amused, almost giggly.

YONTAR

Welcome.

(He sneers.)

SLAND

Who ... what the fuck are you?

Yontar lights a bowl of pitweed and looks Sland over.

YONTAR

You're not all here. Who sent you?

SLAND

Geldish... I think.

YONTAR

Ahhh, I see. Did you kill him?

(He seems genuinely
concerned.)

SLAND

No. I asked of Yontar... and here I
am.

YONTAR

Well, now, there's a name few say
boldly. Even around here. It's just
not done. No, it's not done at all.
No, no, no.

Yontar acts as though he is teaching a child a lesson.

Sland focuses

SLAND

The ass eater lives?!?!

Yontar walks over to Sland.

YONTAR

(MORE)

Don't be absurd, fuzz face! Nothing lives here. Some things exist, but none live.

SLAND

Then why fear the name?

YONTAR

I fear nothing. I do what I say because it is prudent to do so. Here, yes here, I am the king of the land of agonies. I am the deity of atheists. I am he who leads the blind through the valley of razor blades...I AM...

SLAND

Yontar.

Yontar sighs.

YONTAR

Well, I am what's left of him. What you see before you is a prime example of Rangka humor. This is the reason they never get invited to any of the good orgies.

Yontar relights his bowl of pitweed and sits in mid-air.

YONTAR

Yes, I was given the privilege of being the recipient of Rangka pranksterism. A body that cannot live with a mind that cannot die. This is worse than any death I ever imagined. Yet, somehow, it is better than being dead. Yes, it is better, but not by much. If you ever see Geldish again, tell him...LA'KYEE Shhak!

Sland turns to run.

Glass explodes from his skin.

Blood clouds reappear, and beasts writhe beneath him again.

Sland falls to the sands in front of his new companions. He is crying.

He looks up at Geldish.

SLAND

LA'KYEE Shhak!

(Sland whimpers it out as grandly as he can.)

Geldish smiles.

GELDISH

So, he still has a sense of humor.
That's good.

N'leah and BraarB look as though they have seen mist demons. R'yune lets out a growl which would curdle bone. Sland just looks confused.

SLAND

What the Zanubi does it mean?

Geldish stares at him and then whispers ominously.

GELDISH

I am near.

THE ICE PALACE, HOME OF THE SE-JEANT. BLISTERED STONE AND FROZEN MORTAR. SKULLS OF UNSUCCESSFUL INTERLOPERS ADORN THE MASONRY WORK. ICE-COVERED TURRETS HOUSE THE LOOKOUTS. NOT A MASSIVE EDIFICE, AS EDIFICES GO, BUT IMPOSING ALL THE SAME. BEHIND THE THREE VISIBLE WALLS OF THE CASTLE IS A VILLAGE CARVED INTO THE CAVERNS AND HOLLOWES OF A MOUNTAIN. THE VILLAGERS ARE SHELTERED FROM BOTH THE COLD AND FROM VIEW.

A guard monitors the surrounding area using his trinocs and suddenly spies something. He turns toward the courtyard and yells.

GUARD #1

ERDNA, UKU... AGGA ASSA ASHI ASHI!

The massive iron gates are seen opening from the inside.

A large, hooded figure walks in.

It crosses the courtyard, past the many naked, or barely clad, Se-Jeant doing laundry in communal tubs. Their young, also nude, are playing around them.

The creature begins walking up a flight of stairs.

A door opens into a large, ornate room.

DARK WOOD WALLS, HUNTING TROPHIES, AND A SMALL HEARTH IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM. THE FURNITURE IS SLIGHTLY SMALLER THAN AVERAGE, WITH TWO LARGER CHAIRS NEAR AN OPEN FLAME HEARTH.

The new arrival removes three layers of robes, revealing him to be a minotaur in traditional robes. His hooves are unshod, and his hands are bare.

A Medium-sized Se-Jeant enters the room.

KING UKU, ELEGANTLY, YET TASTEFULLY,
DRESSED AND WEARING A THIN GOLD CROWN
ON HIS HEAD.

KING UKU

Apa, Greko

GREKO, A MINOTAUR WITH DEEP, REDDISH
SKIN, AND POWERFUL MUSCLES.

GREKO

Almsa, King Uku.

KING UKU

So, friend Greko, what brings a
lava dweller to our fair but
slightly frigid land?

Greko looks down at the floor.

GREKO

My brother, Ek-kh, has dishonored
our flame. Less than thirty turns
ago, he joined the Naradhama. He is
one with Xhaknar.

While he swallows the hard news, he gets them each a flagon
of Whævin.

KING UKU

This is indeed sad news. Our cold
melts in sympathy with your pain.

Greko takes a slow swallow of his wine before he proceeds.

GREKO

My pit thanks you and is filled
with your warmth.

KING UKU

All things can be done in
friendship; however, you did not
travel this many kays to share only
this information.

Greko sips more wine and nods.

GREKO

The Council of Elders has sent me
on a matter of some urgency. With
Ek-kh's defection, the secrets of
our pit have been laid bare. We
fear Ek-kh may use this knowledge
against his former dwellers. Our
time of mating is coming, as is
yours and the Council believes he
may attempt to take us then when we
are occupied.

KING UKU

(MORE)

Knowledge like that in the crushing grip of Xhaknar is a terrifying thought, if ever there was one.

Greko nods and releases the next part quickly.

GREKO

One other thing has attracted the attention of the Council. Geldish has robbed Xhaknar's repository in Go-Chi.

Uku is stunned.

KING UKU

Geldish? A repository?

Uku gulps his entire glass of Whævin.

KING UKU

Is that not like a blind one stealing a lamp?

Greko refills his glass while speaking.

GREKO

True enough. He has less need for goldens than my pit has for flame. However, the Council believes it was not poverty but convenience which led him to this deed.

KING UKU

Convenience? What meaning dances with your words, friend Greko?

Greko moves closer to the fire while still facing his friend.

GREKO

This much we know. Geldish is traveling with four fringe dwellers who have been previously ... entertained by Xhaknar. A few turns back these five drank and supped in the Crasnia. That is a new haven bar in Go-Chi. They were open about their presence. They escaped into the southern desert into the even mists at even-split. They were headed directly toward Geldish's lair. They took at least three million goldens.

Uku slowly refills his glass.

KING UKU

With that many goldens, he could buy several formidable armies.

Greko smiles.

GREKO

That is what the Council believes
as well.

Uku pulls a chair nearer to the fire than he is comfortable
with.

KING UKU

So ... Anapsida may yet fall. We know
too little to assemble an army. I
shall assemble a patrol of fifty.
If you stay off the trade lanes,
they should guard you until you can
speak to Geldish directly.

Uku calls in a guard, gives instructions, and pours Greko a
drink.

KING UKU

Stay the even, dine with us, and
let our generals assemble a patrol
for you.

GREKO

Amsen, Elnu, your majesty.

As the sun rises the next turn, light snow falls as Greko
leads a squad of fifty Se-Jeant out of the palace. One of the
far younger Se-Jeant's is walking near Greko. Greko is, once
again, heavily robed. The Se-Jeant wear light uniforms.

They march away from the palace.

INTERIOR OF GELDISH'S LAIR. THE WALLS PULSE LIGHTLY, AS
THOUGH BREATHING. THE COLOR SCHEME IS ELDER GOTH. THERE IS
FURNITURE SCATTERED AROUND THE MAIN ROOM.

The Riders have been here a while, and it shows.

N'leah hangs from the ceiling, juggling three balls of flame.
As she juggles, she morphs into her womyn form. Then into her
human-mal-form and back through all three again, never
dropping her balls of flame. When she morphs she still
retains her talons and heel spurs and does not develop human
feet.

Sland watches raptly as the diminutive balls of flame roll
across her naked flesh - R'yune yawns.

BraarB wanders aimlessly about, chewing on something recently
dead, picking her teeth with its bones.

Geldish has curled his legs beneath himself and is
levitating. His bony fingers touching tip to tip as though in
prayer.

Sland jumps up.

SLAND

This is fun! Why do we just fucking sit here these last few turns? We have three million fucking goldens! What the Zanubi are we waiting for?

BraarB turns herself around. This is not an easy task indoors. She motions toward Geldish as she speaks.

BRAARB

We wait because that is what he wants and when we are done waiting, we will do something. What that will be, beats the Zanubi out of me.

She sniggers at her rhyme.

Geldish does not waiver in his hover.

GELDISH

We are going to kill Xhaknar's army and bring water to Go-Chi.

SLAND

What about after our mid-break repast?

Geldish waivers and then collapses to the floor in laughter. R'yune lets out a frightening staccato growl, and N'leah titters. BraarB just looked concerned.

BRAARB

Geldish, may I speak freely?

Geldish nods at her, and she continues.

BRAARB

Although I find your optimism intriguing, I'm afraid I do not fully understand why we are here. It cannot truly be as you state. For us to attack Xhaknar and Anapsida would be suicide, and I have no wish to die a stupid death. Worse, sitting here, Xhaknar's army could crush us in our sleep.

Geldish picks himself off the floor and brushes the dust from his robe.

GELDISH

You share the doubts of Sland?

BraarB smiles.

BRAARB

Light forgive me, but yes.

Geldish twists his skull into something of a grin and continues.

GELDISH

First, both Xhanar and Yontar have attacked my dwelling. As long as we're inside we can come to no harm. As to the rest, I am afraid you are searching for intricacies in a plan of the utmost simplicity.

This statement is met by a room full of blank stares. N'leah sorts it out for them.

N' LEAH

He means his plan is so stupid even we should understand it.

GELDISH

I would not have put it thusly, but you are essentially correct.

He walks over to a keg and pours himself a flagon of Whævin.

N'leah falls from the ceiling and lands lightly on her feet, much to Sland's surprise. She stretches her wings, pours herself a flagon, and turns to face Geldish.

N' LEAH

So, enlighten us, dark one.

SLAND

Yeah! At least let us know what the shit's going on!

The others erupt in laughter.

Geldish looks into each of their eyes and smiles as he sips his wine.

GELDISH

By robbing the bank we have sent up a 'flare,' of sorts. We have served notice to the warrens we are looking. Hopefully, soon, they will be finding.

BraarB watches the expressions of the others.

BRAARB

Do you mean you expect the various warrens and villages to send representatives to negotiate an army?

GELDISH

Yes, that is exactly what I expect.

SLAND

Warriors fucking come, then I fucking stay!

(He is far too loud.)

N'leah wraps an arm around Sland.

N'LEAH

Calm down, Sland. You're starting to sound like a wounded Rakyeeen.

Sland draws a deep breath and sits down.

BraarB walks over to him and hands him a flagon of skank. Sland smiles weakly and swallows half the flagon.

N'leah hops back onto the ceiling and begins making knives appear and disappear. Sland doesn't notice.

BraarB walks over to N'leah and raises her head to speak.

Before she can utter a syllable, N'leah skitters, using her talons and heel spurs for traction, across the beam to the other side of the room.

BraarB realizes N'leah is affording her privacy and follows.

BraarB

Tell me something, N'leah, why do you travel with R'yune?

FLASHBACK: A young N'leah chained and being carted off in a wagon surrounded by Mayanoren soldiers.

N'LEAH V/O

I'm not exactly sure. I was taken by a Mayanoren raiding party when I was fifteen Suns old. I spent the next forty Suns doing whatever I was told.

FLASHBACK: A younger N'leah, naked, folded into a small cage.

N'LEAH V/O (CONT'D)

I met him a little over eight Suns ago. I was working for a sect of village elders in Anapsida ...

FLASHBACK: N'leah, nude, sexually servicing two Naradhma.

N'LEAH V/O (CONT'D)

... doing odd tricks for goldens and food. Mostly food, as they kept me in a cage when I wasn't doing my... odd tricks.

FLASHBACK: R'yune in some woods, hunting an animal.

N'LEAH V/O (CONT'D)

R'yune was hanging around the local haven bar, picking up hunting jobs for a couple of the local haven mistresses... stuff like that.

FLASHBACK: R'yune delivering bags of butchered meat to the two female Naradhama.

N'LEAH V/O (CONT'D)

Bringing them food in return for goldens and personal favors.

FLASHBACK: R'yune is drinking in a bar, being handed a small bag of goldens by two female Naradhama.

N'LEAH V/O (CONT'D)

I knew of him but never met him. I'd merely seen him from time to time when I would serve the elders who came from the haven mistresses' homes.

N'leah, still hanging from the ceiling, sighs.

N'LEAH

Anyway, one even, a local Naradhama, who worked for one of the elders, snuck into my room to terminate my employment.

FLASHBACK: N'leah cowering in the corner of a small room, being threatened by a knife-wielding Naradhama.

N'LEAH V/O

I guess they were tired of me. I don't know how R'yune found out or if he just saw what was happening and followed the assassin ...

FLASHBACK: R'yune kicking in the door.

FLASHBACK: R'yune cutting off all four arms of the Naradhama before stabbing him in the chest.

FLASHBACK: R'yune tossing the limbs on top of the torso and then topping the pile with the severed head.

N'LEAH V/O (CONT'D)

but he followed the Naradhama into my room and left him in six neat little piles. I saw three more dead in the hall. We left the village that even in a bit of a rush.

FLASHBACK: R'yune sheaths his sword and extends a hand to N'leah.

FLASHBACK: She accepts and follows him into the hall, where three more dead Naradhama are crumpled against the walls.

FLASHBACK: N'leah and R'yune running across wasteland away from the village, which can be seen in the distance.

BraarB considers all this for a moment and walks across the room to the barrel of skank and pours herself a flagon.

Geldish smiles at her and resumes his mid-air contemplations.

Sland and R'yune are silently toasting each other, seemingly oblivious to the fact their inability to communicate would, normally, tend to hamper a conversation.

BraarB watches the scene for a moment, crosses the room, and curls up by the fire.

OUTSIDE ANAPSIDA. THE ARMY IS APPROACHING.

ANAPSIDA IS LAYER UPON LAYER OF BUTTRESSMENTS, BATTLEMENTS, AND WEAPONRY. GIANT AX-LIKE OBJECTS RIM THE LOWER PERIMETER. THEIR RAZOR-SHARP EDGES TWIST AND CURL AT OBTUSE ANGLES.

Khaknar's army is on the move. The Naradhama upfront with officers riding deisteeds, the Mayanoren walk behind them, then slaves and supplies behind them, and, finally, at the rearmost, Ek-kh is walking all alone.

The twin half-moons shed pale light on the ground.

Shadows of oozing terrors crawl across the broken land.

As the marchers cross a knoll, Anapsida looms in the distance.

Rising high in front of them are sheer crystal walls creating illusory horrors bathed in the worst fears of dreams.

Beyond the gaping maw that passes for an entrance is Khaknar's blood fountain. Gurgling noises emanate from the fountain, as well as from above. Sixteen still living bodies hang on hooks above a churning swirl contained in a grandiose tureen made from bone, mortar, and mud. Blood slowly drips down into the basin, and a miniature geyser springs forth from the mouth of a skeleton.

The procession makes its way into the massive courtyard.

Xhaknar's servants set his caravan tent down gently and bow.

Xhaknar steps from within and wipes his hands on the gherkin of the nearest slave. He turns to face the rear of the procession and sends for Ek-kh.

Ek-kh rushes forward to his master and genuflects before he kneels.

EK-KH

Yes, Great One. How dare I serve you?

Xhaknar smiles at the obsequiousness of his minion.

XHAKNAR

Fetch me two grindles from the hole and retrieve my even meal.

Ek-kh fetches the two grindles from a locked cage in a hall.

Ek-kh attaches small chains to their thin necks, brings them back to the throne room, and hands them over to Xhaknar, who is now sitting on his throne being attended to by nude, Naradhama slaves.

Ek-kh bows continuously as he backs away.

Xhaknar halfheartedly tortures the grindles as he watches Ek-kh leave. Finally, he deigns to speak to them.

XHAKNAR

Listen well, creatures. You will fly to the home of Geldish. Each turn, one of you will fly to me and report on his activities. If you do not, I will kill one of your kin every breaklight. Since there are only eight others of your pathetic, hideous, kind left on Arretti, I would not make any errors in judgment if I were you.

The two grindles' eyes drip hatred.

Xhaknar removes their collars and tosses them into the air.

They flop to the ground, all the while staring at Xhaknar. Soon, they back away and fly up over the wall.

Xhaknar smiles as he watches them disappear into the night.

DESOLATE LANDSCAPE, SPARSE VEGETATION, AND A SMALL MOUNTAIN ARE ALL WE CAN SEE AS GREKO'S PATROL MARCHES.

Greko's small battalion approaches a large hill. There is only one visible entrance, and it is well guarded by armed minotaurs.

They pass through the gate.

The Se-Jeant patrol is sitting down to a meal with the Dwellers of the Pit in the Great Hall.

LARGE STONE TABLES CIRCLE AN IMMENSE VOLCANIC HEARTH. ABOVE THE HALL, SET INTO THE SOUTH WALL, IS AN ELLIPTICAL STONE TABLE WITH SIX BAROQUE STONE THRONES DIRECTLY BEHIND IT.

Here sit the Elders of the Pit. They watch stoically as meat is laid upon each of the tables below.

ELDER #1

It is still an honor for we elders to be served last. A simple reminder that we serve at the behest of the Brothers of the Flame.

ELDER #2

As it was, as it always should be.

The Se-Jeant are seated away from the roaring hearth.

After a series of speeches and loud cheers, the young Se-Jeant speaks to Greko.

ATA

Tell me, Greko, since this is my first march to your honored home, are the Elders of the Dwellers of the Pit always giving such wonderful speeches?

Greko smiles and looks at the young warrior.

GREKO

My ancestors are honored to hear you praise our Elders, Ata. However, the answer is no. In truth, this is the first speech I have heard in fifteen seasons, other than to fulfill the needs of tradition.

Ata considers this and then takes another swallow of the Whævin.

ATA

(MORE)

Then, truly it is the Se-Jeant are doubly honored to have been here for this event.

Another Minotaur, Ocard, sitting near them smiles.

OCARD

No, friend Ata, it is we who have been honored by the Se-Jeant's loyal friendship, even in these times of impending duress.

There is no pause from Ata this time.

ATA

Tell me Ocard, What kind of friend would not come in a time of duress?

Ocard sighs heavily.

OCARD

That is an answer we hope never to learn.

They all look to the activity at the dais.

OCARD

Shh, now, Elder Urnak is about to speak.

The meat servers sit quickly on the floor and place their trays in front of them. As soon as the tables are stocked, Elder Urnak, on the east end of the table, stands to speak.

ELDER URNAK

Mooth, Schan, Elan!!
As is evidenced by our honored pit this even, Greko has been successful in his quest.

MINATAUR CROWD

Greko! Hushak!!

Elder Urnak smiles and continues

ELDER URNAK

Hushak from the Elders as well, Honored Greko. Our Brothers of the Flame have selected their numbers. All will be ready at breaklight. Our gratitude to the Se-Jeant. To you, we pass on great prayers of strong flame.

An mightier cry erupts from the Minotaurs

MINATAUR CROWD

Se-Jeant! Hushak!!

This time the Se-Jeant respond.

SE-JEANT CROWD

Akka, ANHDI, Erdu!!

The Elders watch, mildly bemused, as several more cheers are exchanged.

Elder Urnak raises his hand for quiet and continues.

ELDER URNAK

Mooth, Mooth ... our thanks to all of you for the honor you spread with dignity. All your chants are deserved. The Dwellers of the Pit and the Holders of the Ice have traded and fought together for almost a thousand Suns. As the turns have come and gone, we feel there is a reason to believe the air around the rumors known to us is pure. Despite this truth, we must inform you that many of you may not return if what we have heard of the actions of Geldish is true. Rest well this even for soon you so honored shall be in the presence of the undead and relying on him to keep you alive. AKNEHA!

THIS CAN BE CUT INTO SHORT SEGMENTS. The meal is well received by all. More chants are exchanged as the meat disappears from the tables. When it concludes, those Minotaurs who are not going on the march next breaklight, wander off to their bunks after wishing warm flame to the Se-Jeant and their own.

ATA

How do you live with this oppressive heat?

Greko laughs.

GREKO

The same way you live with the insufferable cold. It is part of who we are.

SUNRISE. FIFTY MINOTAURS AND FIFTY SE-JEANT LEAVE THE DWELLERS' MOUNTAIN. EACH GROUP IS REPRESENTED BY ONE FLAG BEARER HOISTING A SIMPLE, TRIANGULAR, FLAG WITH THEIR INSIGNIA EMBLAZONED ON IT.

As they finally approach the land of the Fierstans, Ata takes a long swig from a flask of ice wine.

ATA

Tell me, friend Greko, we approach the Fierstans. Do you think they will march with us?

GREKO

I do not know, friend Ata.

(MORE)

I have never had the gift of foresight. One thing I do know is we will not find out until we ask.

Ata laughs.

Ata smiles as he hands Greko his flask.

ATA

Ice wine?

GREKO

Why not? There is a definite chill in the air this morning.

Greko smiles and takes a long swallow like the young warrior before him just did.

His lungs scream, his throat convulses, his eyes pinch into slits. He feels as though he has poured molten lava into his gullet.

Ata is watching him with a less than sympathetic expression.

ATA

One of our best vintages. Fresh mountain roots fermented in ice and then stored in a mountain cask over a true nature flame. Delicious, isn't it?

Greko can no longer hide his consternation.

GREKO

This stuff could kill you!

ATA

Or cure you.

THE REALM OF THE FIERSTANS. A WALLED ENCLAVE WITH TURRETS AT IRREGULAR INTERVALS. MUCH OF IT IS UNDERGROUND, SO ITS SIZE IS DECEIVING. THE MAIN GATE IS LARGE, WOODEN, AND THICK. IT IS ADORNED WITH BRASS RINGS AND IS SCARRED FROM EARLIER BATTLES.

A sentry in the realm of the Fierstans is watching their arrival. After making sure he is interpreting the situation correctly, he pulls a triangle off the wall and speaks into it.

SENTRY

Watcher Urkel, you were correct. They are coming directly to us.

The speaker crackles to life beside the sentry

WATCHER URKEL V/O

Thank you, guardian. Are they still just Pit Dwellers and Se-Jeant?

SENTRY

(MORE)

Yes, Watcher Urkel.

WATCHER URKEL V/O

Very well, guardian. Please inform the gate to allow two of their representatives to enter the main area.

SENTRY

As you command, Watcher Urkel.

Four Fierstans ride out on deisteeds and meet the marchers. After brief introductions, the riders begin to return, and Greko and Ata walk behind them as they are led into the palace.

When they get to a wooden door, they get a clear look at the many ancient battle scars burned in.

They are led through the palace to a large waiting room. The walls are decorated with ancient texts.

In a comfortable chair, behind an ornate desk, sits Urkel, leader of the Fierstans. He is smoking a magnificent pipe, held in his upper right hand, and filling out some paperwork with his lower left.

Their reverie is broken by the sound of a high voice wrapped in culture.

WATCHER URKEL

I am Urkel, Watcher of the Fierstans. What brings you to our humble village?

Greko gathers his wits and speaks for all.

GREKO

We have a request, legendary one. I am Greko, Fourth Level Dweller of the Pit, and this is Ata, Patrol Leader of the Se-Jeant.

Urkel permits himself a wry smile. He relights his pipe and faces them directly.

WATCHER URKEL

With such honored representatives sharing my parlor, I fear the request will be great indeed.

Ata jumps forward.

ATA

Oh no, Watcher Urkel! We have come merely to request a patrol of Fierstans join us on our expedition to Geldish's lair.

Urkel frowns.

WATCHER URKEL

So, despite all the other traumas denigrating our lives, the words of his deed have reached as far as you.

Greko and Ata are completely flabbergasted.

GREKO

We were not aware...

WATCHER URKEL

Aware that we cared of the comings and goings on the Plains? We are secluded, not ignorant. It would be the purest of follies to disregard the actions of others that could, nay, would, once again, bring flame where flame has no use being.

Ata raises his voice.

ATA

If you are, indeed, aware of what has occurred, you must, by rights, have come to the same conclusion as we!

Urkel glares at him. His voice barely controlled; he responds.

WATCHER URKEL

IF? MUST?

He takes a long breath.

WATCHER URKEL

You are young and eager and, for all of that ... correct. We, too, see the fires of war in the near future. We, too, have danced the Aklop in the joy of wishing Xhaknar a lingering death. However, I do not understand why you send patrols and not just two representatives.

Greko returns calmly to the conversation.

GREKO

There have been marauding bands of Naradhama sighted on the Plains, and the Mayanoren have been near our pit twice in the last twenty turns.

Urkel considers this for a moment.

WATCHER URKEL

How could the Mayanoren find what is widely believed to be a myth?

Greko shrinks a little inside and answers.

GREKO

My brother, Ek-kh, has dishonored our flame and joined with Xhaknar. We believe he is giving information to Xhaknar in return for favors which would shame a kgum.

Greko's large head hangs low.

Urkel responds carefully.

WATCHER URKEL

Hmm, your Pit must think well of you to have brought you all the way to the Fourth Level, and you, Ata, diminutive though you are, stand before me as a Patrol Leader. Together you have traveled the Plains just to make a request of a 'legendary' somebody. That seems like a lot of work for an answer that could and should be no.

Greko and Ata can barely repress their smiles. Before they can gush their thanks, Urkel continues.

WATCHER URKEL

It has always been, and still is to the best of my knowledge, a Fierstan truism that 'to ride with the honored is to be honored.' I wish I could ride with you myself. It has been many Suns since I took a patrol to battle. However, needs dictate I stay here and continue to be 'legendary.' According to my gate guardian, you march two patrols of fifty troops each, is that correct?

ATA

Yes, your majesty.

Greko lets his head once again raise him to his full height.

Urkel watches them contemplatively for a moment and smiles.

WATCHER URKEL

All is good then. Now you shall march three patrols.

THREE RANGKA STAND, FACING AN IDOL FEATURING TWO HEADS, EIGHT ARMS, AND FIVE LEGS POSED AS THOUGH RUNNING. THE FIRST RANGKA, KARRISH, IS SHORTER AND ROUNDER THAN GELDISH. NEXT TO HIM STANDS MAKISH, ALSO SHORT BUT INCREDIBLY THIN. BESIDE HIM STANDS ELZISH, THE TALLEST OF THE THREE.

They walk away from the idol into a dining area.

Karrish tears into something resembling meat and looks at the other two.

KARRISH

Tell me, brethren, what news have you?

ELZISH

Yontar has made another attempt to escape, but has fared worse than last time.

Karrish smiles a tiny smile and then looks at Elzish.

KARRISH

I take it then, Brother Geldish's ethereal reinforcements were satisfactory?

They laugh.

KARRISH

No matter what Geldish does, in spite of his expanding powers, he cannot hope to halt the Naradhama with savvy parlor tricks.

As his sentence fades the fourth tabernacle kindles to life. Geldish resolves through the ground.

GELDISH

Parlor tricks? You do not do your teachings justice, Brother Karrish.

Karrish bows

KARRISH

Your words honor us, brother, but your presence confuses. We had thought you never to return after you built your own temple.

GELDISH

I will be blunt, brothers; I intend to end Xhaknar's reign. For this to truly occur, we four must ride together.

All three of the Rangka are taken aback.

ELZISH

Already, we have lost too much!

KARRISH

You knew the rules when you undertook your crusade lo those many Suns ago. We cannot do this thing. We must not! All could unravel.

GELDISH

You are right, Brother Elzish, we have lost much. True, it all could or it could not. It does not matter. Much has changed since I left the venerated halls of the Temple of Azarep. I now know how to beat the barrier surrounding Xhaknar in battle.

Karrish pours himself a drink.

KARRISH

Brother Geldish, you have always made your own way in the world. It is your wont to do so. Nonetheless, just because you have found your path to a future does not mean we should tread upon it.

Elzish pulls something wiggling off a tray and eats it.

ELZISH

What of the fringe dwellers you have attained? Will they not ride with you?

Geldish sighs.

GELDISH

Of course, they will. Their pasts may be dark, but their desire for a future which includes them is burning brightly within.

Makish fills a drink.

MAKISH

Maybe this is enough.

GELDISH

I would hope so, Brother Makish, but I cannot fool myself. The four of us would be a nearly impenetrable wall ... the dwellers, as good as they are, would be a mere brittle facade.

Karrish sits at the repast table

KARRISH

Nevertheless, you must make do with these, erm, brittle riders of yours or return to your place of rebirth within these walls. There would be no shame.

The flames in Geldish's grow larger.

GELDISH

We once ruled this world. Arretti
then flourished.

KARRISH

Our old kind ruled. We inherited
despair.

GELDISH

We once walked in pride amongst the
denizens of the Plains.

ELZISH

We once carried flesh on our bones.
Turns come and go and always bring
change.

GELDISH

We once ensured peace and
prosperity.

Makish walks over to Karrish.

MAKISH

Now we merely guard against war and
degradation. Geldish, hear me well;
there are no more wizards on
Arretti to die and join us. We are
the last. Should we do as you
desire, then there will be no more.
You know, as well as we, what
happened when last our kind
attacked Anapsida.

Geldish shrugs.

GELDISH

If we are to die in any case, then
why not expire on our terms?

KARRISH

Tell me, Brother Geldish ... look
me in my eyes and tell me what good
our deaths will do, and we will
ride with you. Think hard, brother,
before you speak.

Geldish hisses and then melts into the floor and his
tabernacle fades to dark.

The remaining Rangka turn to face the idol and bow.

They return to the repast table and refill their drinks.

MAKISH

Will we ride?

Karrish looks at him and smiles.

KARRISH

Not yet, but someturn we may.

(MORE)

This war that looms ahead belongs to Geldish. When we do ride again, there will be a reason we can justify. As evil as Xhaknar is, as much as we hate the Plains under his rule, we would accomplish nothing by riding now.

ELZISH

What of his ... Brittle Riders? They have no prayer against the Naradhama, notwithstanding what the Mayanoren will do to them.

Karrish smiles.

KARRISH

Well, now, a prayer is something we can offer.

He pulls a cord on a wall and smiles as a Kgul walks in

KARRISH

Take four nytsteeds to Geldish. Make sure they are fully packed.

Elzish seems relieved.

ELZISH

Well, at least now they will ride with honor.

Makish frowns.

MAKISH

Well, four of them will have our protection, but what of the Llamia? She cannot ride a nytsteed.

KARRISH

Her kind has no real need of our protection

MAKISH

You have never told us why that is.

KARRISH

Someturn, you will see for yourself. However, it is now time for our invocations.

They return to their idol.

OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE OF AZAREP.

The Kgul loads four nytsteeds with complete travel gear.

The Kgul loads a huge kgum with his own gear.

It rides into the bleak horizon.

OUTSIDE GELDIH'S LAIR.

Braarb and Sland are watching N'leah and R'yune spar. Geldish is watching from near his front door.

N'leah smiles as she arcs gracefully over Geldish's lair and then slides sideways through the air. Her lean, nude body caresses the midday sky with an eerie sensuality.

Suddenly, she twists and dives towards the ground. R'yune leaps, apparently to the side, then spins and grabs her ankle and tosses her into the soft sand. N'leah bursts out in friendly laughter. BraarB joins in as she helps N'leah up.

BraarB smiles as she hands N'leah a flagon of Whævin.

BRAARB

Very, very impressive. I did not know bipeds could move so elegantly.

R'yune, also nude, grunts and pulls a flask off his belt lying on the ground nearby and takes a swig.

N'leah laughs even louder. Her laugh is gentle, innocent, and honest.

N'LEAH

I believe he said, 'thank you.'

R'yune nods enthusiastically. BraarB grabs the flagon back, takes a swig, and stares down at R'yune's powerful thighs.

BRAARB

Speaking of impressive, I think R'yune's warrior soul has gotten the better of him. I thought you weren't supposed to wear a sword in mock combat. Not even if it's strapped to an inside thigh.

BraarB keeps smiling.

N'leah smiles and then fails to suppress a giggle.

BRAARB

What's so funny, N'leah?

N'LEAH

Uh, that's not a sword. R'yune would never do that. One of us might be accidentally injured. R'yune would rather disembowel himself than allow that to happen.

BraarB is still staring. Her eyes grow wider and wider, reality sinks in.

BRAARB

Do you mean to tell me that. . .

(MORE)

this thing. . . it's his. . . OH,
SWEET ROHTA!

That finishes off any sense of decorum that may have existed.
N'leah falls down laughing. R'yune smiles a Wolfen grin.

Sland sidles up next to BraarB and pats her on her haunches.

SLAND

Wolfen are strong in all things, eh
R'yune? Think BraarB; he could even
hold you down with that thing.

Sland's brief monologue simply tosses them all back into
laughter.

Geldish wanders over and strokes BraarB's mane. Soon, they
all quiet down.

GELDISH

Even falls, my friends. We must go
inside. Xhaknar's eyes could find
us in the dark.

N'leah suddenly turns and faces across the Plains.

N'LEAH

Something comes. Large, fast, and
quiet. If I didn't know better, I'd
say it's a Kgul.

They all watch the horizon. Soon, a Kgul with four nysteads.
close behind him. Their flame-lit eyes remind all of Geldish.

Geldish smiles.

GELDISH

Azarep will live.

Sland turns and faces the Rangka.

SLAND

What you mean dead one? Azarep all
gone. Temple gone. Azarep all dead.

Geldish turns and looks at Sland. His eyes pierce the
BadgeBeth's soul.

GELDISH

Death never slowed me down; why
would it stop the Azarep?

SLAND

You are from Azarep?

BraarB stares at the oncoming sight and gasps.

BRAARB

If you are truly of the Azarep,
then those beasts now approaching
are well and truly nytsteeds.

N'leah slides into the even air and calls down.

N' LEAH

It must be true because, unless all those ancient images I saw as a small were lies, those beasts are most definitely nytsteeds.

A grindle peer out of the nearby sands and watches the unfolding tableau.

The Kgul speaks. Its voice is both warm and terrifying.

KGUL

The Temple of Azarep sends you its blessings. We Kgul pledge you our fealty.

The Kgul wanders across the sands to their lair.

Much to the surprise of the assembled, a grindle pops out of the sand and flies to the Kgul. Alighting gently on the massive roiling clay/flesh, it settles in for the walk back to Geldish's abode.

Geldish's smile disappears as he watches what the Kgul is bringing to him. He looks the creature directly in the eyes.

GELDISH

You are a spy of Xhaknar's?

GRINDLE

Yessssss, I am. Musssst do thisssss thing.

Geldish ignores the statement.

GELDISH

What have you seen?

GRINDLE

Nothing, until thisssss.

GELDISH

Will you tell Xhaknar?

GRINDLE

Musst. Will kill otherssss if I not.

GELDISH

Others? What others? All grindles were killed by Xhaknar to spite the Se-Jeant, your friends.

GRINDLE

Ten live. Ten all there iss on Arreti. All there izz on the Plainsss and ssXhaknar keep usss in cage near the blood fountain.

N'leah looks at the grindle.

N' LEAH

Why don't you just lie to Xhaknar?
Or, maybe we should just kill you
here and now. You are a threat to
us if you work for Xhaknar.

Geldish raises his arm towards her.

GELDISH

No, Xhaknar can smell lies. If this
Grindle lies, the others will die.
As for working for Xhaknar, none do
that task freely or willingly
except the Mayanoren and now, of
course, the Naradhama. No, we must
devise a different plan of action.
We must use this to our advantage.
Tell me, grindle, how do you
report?

GRINDLE

When brother come, we ssleep. I
leave when I can and, come
breaklight, report what I know to
ssXhaknar.

GELDISH

When will your brother be here?

GRINDLE

He come now, sssseeeee him near.

The Kgul walks a short distance away and holds out its arm.
The next grindle alights and nestles itself in the warm
clay/flesh.

The Kgul carries the Grindle back to the others.

GELDISH

Welcome, comrade grindle, you are
amongst friends. I am only going to
ask you tell Xhaknar the truth. The
first grindle, you will tell what
you have seen this even.

He turns to face the scnd grinndle on the Kgul's arm.

GELDISH

You, second grindle, when you make
your journey, you will tell Xhaknar
we are marching towards him. That
will be the truth. We will march on
Xhaknar and Anapsida come next mid-
break. Do you both understand?

Both grindles nod affirmatively.

GELDISH

Good.

(MORE)

Now for you, second grindle, take this vial from me and hide it well. It is a magic potion. After you tell Xhaknar we are marching towards him, he will have no need to send you back here. His spies on the Plains can keep track of us then. He will throw you back in your cage. When he does, you will take this vial from its hiding place and pour it on the bars of your cage. It will melt them. You will be free then. Flee Anapsida and go to the land of the Fierstans. Watcher Urkel will take care of you. Do you understand?

Both grindles nod enthusiastically.

The first grindle stretches and then flies off into the dark. The second grindle stares at the vial, smiles as only a grindle can, and puts it under its tongue.

INSIDE GELDISH'S HOME.

All are checking weapons and drinking skank. The Kgul and the grindle are eating meat ripped directly off the hearth, and Geldish is eating, drinking, and smiling.

THE THREE PATROLS ARE MARCHING TOGETHER. THE PALACE OF THE FIERSTANS IS OFF IN THE DISTANCE. THE SKY IS SPARSELY CLOUDED. THE LANDS ARE BARREN, AND ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY TROOPS ARE MARCHING SOUTH. A FLAG BEARER FOR EACH SPECIES, SE-JEANT, MINOTAUR, AND FIERSTAN, LEADS THE PROCESSION. BEHIND THEM ARE SEVERAL WAGONS, PULLED BY FOUR DEISTEEDS EACH AND ALL DRIVEN BY FIERSTANS WITH OTHER FIERSTANS SITTING ATOP THEM.

Greko, Ata, and a Fierstan are marching side by side near the front.

NAK

Greetings, friend Greko, we have never been formally introduced. I am Guardian Nak.

Introductions are made all around.

Nak pulls a carafe off his belt, opens it, takes a swig, and offers it to Greko.

Greko blanches, and Ata laughs.

ATA

Friend Greko is not one for strong drink.

Nak laughs.

NAK

Fear not, friend Greko, it is a refreshing drink we Fierstans use to start our turns. It is made from nothing more potent than beans.

Fierstans begin jumping off the wagons, grabbing dishes proffered from inside, and racing through the ranks to provide meals to the troops.

Several troops compliment them on the high quality of the food.

They continue their march.

SUN IS SETTING, EXTERIOR OF GELDISH'S HOME

Geldish is talking to the Kgul. The Kgul is holding a grindle on its arm. We can see the others in the background, packing and loading the nyesteeds for travel.

KGUL

The temple will not ride with you.
They say it is not yet time.

Geldish looks angry and starts to speak but stops himself. Finally, he takes a deep breath.

GELDISH

Yet, they sent us these nyesteeds.

KGUL

Yes. While you will not receive the true power of the temple, this brittle façade you've assembled may suffice.

Geldish considers this and smiles.

GELDISH

Do not underestimate them. They are lethal and powerful, and they will be my riders into Anapsida.

KGUL

Fine, then so be it. I shall tell the temple to watch for the doings of your brittle riders. As much as I like you, Geldish, that is all I can do.

Geldish nods.

GELDISH

And I hope that will be enough. If everything I set in motion is working, representatives will be headed our way to negotiate the cost of an army. We will leave now and head due northeast to meet them. There is no reason to brook any delay.

The Kgul nods and leaves to tend to the nyesteeds one more time before the journey begins.

DESOLATE LANDSCAPE. SPARSE VEGETATION. SMALL CREATURES CAN BE SEEN BURROWING INTO THE GROUND.

Geldish, N'leah, R'yune, and Sland are riding nyesteeds, heading northeast. BraarB and the Kgul are keeping pace alongside them.

As they approach a small hill, a moving puff of smoke or dust can be seen.

Geldish silently motions at N'leah. She nods, lets go of the reins, spreads her wings, and leaps into the sky. She quickly becomes a pin prick in the distance.

Soon enough, she swoops back down, spreads her legs, and lands on the nyesteed. It's not an elegant move, but it works.

N' LEAH

Mayanorens. A patrol of twenty just to the north of us. They appear to have stopped to eat. There's no camp as far as I can see.

Geldish considers.

GELDISH

Waiting for them could set us back clicks. Did you see a way around them?

N'leah shakes her head no.

N' LEAH

Too much open land. All I saw was a dry gulch leading right to them.

GELDISH

How deep is it? Could we hide in it?

All eyes are on Geldish. N'leah gives it some thought.

N' LEAH

If we leave the nyesteeds behind, yes.

Geldish dismounts and hands his reins to the Kgul.

GELDISH

We're going to get blood on our hands soon enough, anyway, may as well be now.

R'yune barks a laugh, and Sland grunts happily.

SLAND

'Bout damn time!

BraarB hangs back as the other three check their weapons and follow Geldish up the hill.

The Kgul ambles over the BraarB and hands her two sets of reins. She chuckles ruefully and takes them.

BRAARB

We're too big for fighting like this.

Braarb Looks dejected.

The Kgul puts its hand on her shoulder.

KOUL

Strength and size can be weaknesses. The smart warrior lives because it knows when they are.

She stares at the Kgul.

Geldish is leading the other three through the gulley. They each unsheathe long knives as they get close to their target.

The Mayanoren are in a circle, laughing, and eating.

The four of them explode from the gulley, slashing and stabbing. The Mayanoren, caught off guard, scramble to get into any formation that would provide a defense. The onslaught is leaving them little opportunity to do that. None of the attackers are vocal. They just keep silently killing. One Mayanoren finally draws its sword only to be stabbed in the throat by Sland, who immediately snags the sword and beheads the Mayanoren nearest to the new corpse.

The ambush is quickly over. R'yune punts the decapitated head, and N'leah leaps into the air to signal the others that it's safe to approach.

Soon they are all together surrounded by dead Mayanorens. The Kgul grunts enthusiastically.

INTERIOR ANAPSIDA, XHAKNAR'S THRONE ROOM

Ek-kh is carrying the second grindle to its cage. Xhaknar walks out of the room and approaches a Naradhama who is standing at attention.

XHAKNAR

Geldish is coming here. That means he will have to march due northwest from his lair. Send your spies and keep me apprised of his progress. If you can kill him and the others, do so. If not, we will plan accordingly.

The Naradhama salutes and leaves without saying a word.

Outside Anapsida, a small patrol of Naradhama is heading southeast. The Naradhama Xhaknar had been speaking to is in the lead. He is speaking to the others.

NARADHAMA #1

This Geldish must not be as smart as the myths say if he's marching right to us. We will save our energy. When we see his dust, we will hide and ambush them. Bringing Xhaknar their heads should earn us some bonus goldens.

A second, Naradhama laughs.

NARADHAMA #2

If not, who cares? We'll still have the heads as trophies.

They stroll away from Anapsida, leisurely checking their weapons.

GREKO, ATA, AND NAK CONTINUE TO LEAD THE PATROL SOUTHWARD. THE VARIOUS TROOPS ARE COMPARING WEAPONS WITH EACH OTHER.

Nak barks some orders, and three deisteeds are separated from their caravans, and each is mounted by a different trooper, one Se-Jeant, one Minotaur, and one Fierstan.

Greko looks at Nak.

GREKO

We've been marching for a while. Why wait until now to send out a patrol?

Nak smiles.

NAK

(MORE)

It is a Fiesrtan practice to shadow a patrol for a few cliks to make sure everything starts without a problem. By now, I imagine they are on their way back to Watcher Urkel with their report, so it is time for us to watch out for ourselves.

Ata, who was listening in, laughs.

ATA

So now we can act as though we're all grown and capable of feeding ourselves.

Greko laughs too.

Nak smiles dryly.

NAK

It may seem like that, but the land of the Fiesrtans is the only one to not only repel attacks from Anapsida but also injure them deeply. This is why we are mostly left alone. But 'mostly' is not always. Precautions are forever in place.

The other two sober after that.

Nak orders all the flags folded and packed.

THE BRITTLE RIDERS, IN TIGHT FORMATION, PROCEEDING ACROSS A RUINED LANDSCAPE.

About two cliks after the slaughter of the Mayanorens, the riders catch their first glimpse of the oncoming columns. Still some considerable distance away, they can barely make out the cloud of dust caused by their impending allies. They increase their gait to an easy gallop and head in that direction.

A little more than a clik later, they can make out the distinctions in the columns. Minotaurs on the left, Se-Jeant on the right, and Fierstans securely in the middle. All three columns have weapons at the ready but fly no colors.

GELDISH

Some good news. Those troops are military. There'll be no fawning courtiers or weasel-mouthed ambassadors to deal with. I'd feared there might.

The columns spot The Brittle Riders approach, halt and begin erecting a large tent.

A few epi-cliks later, the riders arrive and dismount. A massive Minotaur strides up to them.

GREKO

Greetings, dead one. I am Greko, Fourth Level Dweller of the Pit. This is Ata, patrol leader of the Se-Jeant, and we are honored also by the presence of Nak, troop guardian of the Fierstans.

GELDISH

Greetings to each of you, and thank you for making this journey. The BadgeBeth is named Sland, the Wolfen, R'yune, the Succubus is N'leah, and the Llamia are represented by my dear friend BraarB. I am sure you have many questions, and I will attempt to answer all of them. But first, let us break bread together and relax. Now that we are assembled, we have plenty of time.

R'yune brings forth a bag of provisions he has on his nytsteed and lays them on the table. Greko inwardly groans when he sees Sland load two flasks of ice wine onto the table.

The respective leaders prepare for their meal while the remaining troops set up a rough perimeter and light fires to cook their food.

The conversation around the table is light. Much lighter than Greko would have expected. Ranging from such "controversial" topics as the weather, crops, and how everyone's respective families are doing, it all seemed pointless to Greko. He is growing more uncomfortable by the minute. Geldish senses it and turns to face him.

GELDISH

Relax, friend Greko. War will come soon enough. Blood will flow in rivers across the parched lands. There's no need to rush it any faster.

Greko looks at him, puzzled for a moment, and then decides he's right.

When the meal is finished, Nak sends out mixed patrols to bring back regular reports in case they'd been followed or are being watched. Then they sat down to talk.

NAK

Tell me, dead one, what do you hope to accomplish by summoning us out of our safe warrens?

Geldish smiles.

GELDISH

I have summoned no one. I merely sent a subtle signal that times may be about to change.

That brought a round of raucous laughter.

ATA

"Subtle?!?" What was so subtle about stealing millions of goldens from Xhaknar's repository and then signing your name on the bricks?

The Riders clearly didn't know the last part.

GELDISH

Well, compared to what I wanted to do, this seemed subtle enough.

GREKO

In all seriousness, even if we three brands combine our forces, we are no match for the Naradhama and the Mayanoren. No one has an accurate count, but our scouts say there are over half a million Naradhama stationed at Anapsida and another three hundred thousand Mayanoren in camps throughout the surrounding plains. Add in the fact that Anapsida is heavily fortified and could easily outlast any siege we could bring, and I see no chance of success.

Geldish sighs

GELDISH

I'm dead, not stupid, Greko. I have no intention of attacking Anapsida directly. At least not now. Xhaknar has woven a blanket of despair and fear over the Plains. Before we can throw that off, we must first pull apart many of the threads. Once it is sufficiently weakened, then we can consider more direct action.

ATA

Great Uku has had similar thoughts But we've always dismissed them because of what Xhaknar's retribution would be.

(MORE)

It is one thing to defeat one of the Naradhama raiding parties; he expects some losses there. It is quite another to attack him openly, even if only on a small scale.

GELDISH

Agreed. Were only one brand brave enough to do that deed, that brand would be annihilated. Every single being, right down to the last small, would be eradicated. However, I propose we keep up a series of running attacks on his outposts and garrisons. Those are his weak points. They are manned by untrained Mayanoren, slaves, and traitors for the most part. And not just one strike or two, but a full Sun's worth with one happening each turn. We will force him to waste time and resources. Further, I propose we crush his supply lines. Anapsida creates nothing on its own except pain. It requires enormous amounts of food, medical supplies, and so on. Xhaknar thinks himself smart because he uses an underground rail system he built to keep his supplies safe and away from prying eyes. But I know where that system is, and it does not take much effort to cause a cave-in. Tunnels, once exposed, are delightfully vulnerable targets. Lastly, I propose we set up a headquarters in the pit of the Minotaurs..."

Before he can finish, Greko, once again, interrupts him.

GREKO

Sadly, that cannot be. My brother Ek-kh has dishonored our flame and our line by allying himself with Xkaknar. The last word we heard is he was named leader of the Naradhama in return for his knowledge. Ek-kh has always been a problem, preferring lusts and passions over the important things in life. It is with great shame that I admit he has put his carnal desires above the needs of his family and his pit.

Geldish is astonished.

GELDISH

The shame is not yours to have. All shame belongs to Ek-kh. But I suppose it matters little where we meet. Xhaknar will find out soon enough. My guess is we'll need many places before this work is done.

The conversation continues well enough.

As the participants are getting ready to leave, Geldish adds two more things to the proceedings.

GELDISH

Before you depart, I would like to ask you to send a small patrol to the realm of Lord Südermann. I have a message for him that may aid us greatly when the time comes.

NAK

Lord Südermann? The murderous insectoid? The one whose lands are so well guarded that all who enter them die? The one who's Mantis Guards skinned a thousand Mayanoren and sent their skeletons back to Anapsida in carts? That Lord Südermann?

GELDISH

That's the one. Whoever goes will go with a flag of Südermann as protection. I have it in my kit. No harm will come to the patrol. On that, you have my word. Secondly, I promised a grundle I would march on Anapsida. Since I like to keep my promises, I ask ten soldiers from each column to join me.

It's quiet enough to hear hair grow. Not one being moves.

Finally, Ata speaks.

ATA

I would ask how you got a flag of Südermann, but I'm quite sure I would hate the answer. As to the insane march on Anapsida, my warriors will need a good reason for joining. We are not, by nature, suicidal. And, though my experience with them is limited, I believe the same holds true for the others here this turn.

Geldish smiles.

GELDISH

Not one warrior will be harmed. We only march towards Anapsida for a while until we have the attention of Xhaknar; then, everyone can return to their warrens. Let's just say this will be the first thread pulled and leave it at that.

Much to everyone's surprise, Sland laughs.

SLAND

I fucking love this. We will march less than forty on Anapsida while waiting for bug-brands to do whatever it is we expect bug-brands to do, and, somehow, this will make Xhaknar tremble. Of all the ways I thought I could die, this never occurred to me. I fucking love it. New things are always fun. Even the ones that try and kill you.

R'yune growls mirthlessly, but BraarB and N'leah can't contain their laughter.

N' LEAH

Why not? Xhaknar surely knows we've aligned with Geldish by now, so there's no turning back in any case. If we're going to die, let it be an unusual death. I'm with Sland. Whatever you have up your sleeve besides bone had better see us through, though; otherwise, me and mine will torment you for your entire afterlife.

After some more uncomfortable laughter, it was agreed.

GREKO

I, Ata, and Nak will choose nine soldiers from our ranks. Three more from each column shall ride south to the realm of Lord Südermann. The rest will return to let our respective warrens know what we are about to do.

A SMALL GROUP OF HILLS. SOME PINE TREES AND SCRUB BRUSH COVER THEM.

Geldish's riders, and allies, ambush a patrol of Naradhama when the sun is highest, killing them all.

TOP OF A HILL. BARREN LANDSCAPE ALL AROUND.

The riders, et al, come across a group of unknown species wearing long robes at the bottom of a small hill.

GREKO

Mercenaries. We have dealt with them before. They are dangerous.

Geldish laughs.

GELDISH

Not as dangerous as us.

THE RIDERS ARE HEADING WEST, AND A PILE OF BURNING BODIES CAN BE SEEN BEHIND THEM.

THE RIDERS, ET AL, SETTING UP CAMP. THE SUN IS SETTING AND THEY ARE IN A COPSE OF TREES SURROUNDED BY SANDY GROUND.

Ata talking to Geldish as the Brittle Riders are pulling meals out of their packs.

ATA

I have to tell you, dead one, your fringe dwellers are something. There isn't one of us who doesn't owe them our lives.

Geldish turns to the riders.

GELDISH

I can't just let them keep calling you fringe dwellers.

SLAND

Why the fuck not? It's what we are. Or will your magic put us in a royal house? Will King Gornd bow down before me in the Revered House of BadgeBeth?

The thought makes him laugh some more.

R'yune attempts what might have been a curtsy, and everyone bursts out laughing.

Geldish smiles.

GELDISH

The Kgul called you Brittle Riders. At first, I thought it an insult. Now, I'm not so sure. While it is true you are brittle compared to the power of the Rangka, the Rangka aren't here, and you are.

(MORE)

More importantly, I can't seem to come up with a better name for you.

Greko hears the last part and laughs.

GREKO

Fine dead one, the Brittle Riders they are. Like Ata, all I know is we each owe them our lives. I have never seen fighting skills like they possess.

N' LEAH

You'd be amazed what you can learn and do when you are less than one turn from Xhaknar's blood fountain.

ATA

Fine. We now ride behind your Brittle Riders. But how will Anapsida know this if we keep killing everyone it sends at us? We should let one go free to return to Xhaknar with that knowledge, and then he will surely kill the messenger.

Geldish thinks about that for a minute and heads out into the sands. He returns with a grindle.

GELDISH

You are free of Xhaknar now?

The grindle smiles and nods.

GELDISH

We need not fear you telling Xhaknar where we are or what we do?

More smiles and shakes its head.

GELDISH

Could you get word to Xhaknar of what we have done without being recaptured?

The grindle thinks for a moment and then smiles.

GRINDLE

Yessss, there iss a patrol of Mayanoren, half a turn to the north of you, looking for you. I can tell them ssXhaknar sssent me to warn them you are near. If wissshed, I can sssay exactly where you be. Mayanoren not know if we lie and are too far from ssXhaknar to know we essscaped thanksss to you.

GELDISH

Good enough.

(MORE)

Well, troops, where would you like to be ambushed?

BraarB

How about right here? I'm tired of walking. Let them do the work this time.

That idea is met with a hearty round of approval and becomes the plan.

They, grundle included, share a meal.

The sun sets.

Just after breaklight, the grundle soars into the growing dawn and disappears to the north.

Geldish and his newly anointed Brittle Riders lay around the fire as though asleep. Hidden in the sand around them are the thirty warriors.

The Mayanoren, thinking they caught them by surprise, rush the camp.

Before they are within spitting distance of the 'sleeping' riders, the remaining warriors burst from the sands, knock out one Mayanoren, and kill all the rest.

After the battle, the troops, except for the Brittle Riders, hide behind the dune.

R'yune and Sland strip the Mayanoren and discard his weapons into the sands while Braarb and N'leah stand guard with swords drawn. Once concluded, they draw their swords and join them in front of the unconscious Mayanoren.

Geldish slaps the unconscious Mayanoren.

GELDISH

Wake up, warrior. It's time for you to leave."

The Mayanoren stares at him in open contempt. Even though he isn't bound, he can see four swords pointed at his throat as well as the Rangka calmly standing before him.

Since Geldish isn't interested in anything the brute has to say, he continues.

GELDISH

You will report back to Xhaknar and tell him of the events of this turn. You will tell him your patrol was decimated by Geldish and his Brittle Riders.

(MORE)

You will tell him we let you live because we wanted him to know. We would have let him know sooner, but we kept forgetting to leave a survivor.

Geldish takes a breath and then assumes a petulant tone.

GELDISH

I know, I know, you think that's sloppy of us. Well, as you can tell, they are new to being warriors, so it's hard to keep them under control. You remember your first battles, don't you? Your blood up, your fires stoked? Your enemies falling before you? Yes, I can see you do. Good. So, here's how this will work. We have all your weapons and aren't going to give them back. You will be given a canteen with enough water for you to make it back to Anapsida, and that is all. You may leave now.

BraarB is the first to lower her sword and hands the Mayanoren a large canteen.

The others move closer to Geldish but never let down their guard.

Geldish makes a shooing motion, and the Mayanoren runs off.

N'leah sails into the sky to make sure he isn't coming back. After a while, she lands, laughing.

N'LEAH

He's running so fast he may make Anapsida by even fall.

Geldish laughs and whistles a signal to the warriors, letting them know to return.

GREKO

Well, that was fun. What do we do next?

GELDISH

Leave the bodies as they are so Xhaknar will know he's been told the truth. Take everything else, including their weapons. Then get out of here and back to your Elders as fast as you can. I will be in contact in fifteen turns. On that even, have a representative from each of your warrens meet me in the haven bar in Go-Chi.

(MORE)

The innkeeper there is quite fond of me and won't give us any trouble. Then return to your warrens and tell them all we have done. This particular thread has been loosened enough. Khaknar will be in a rage. By next breaklight, I wouldn't be surprised if there were a thousand Naradhama scouring these hills.

As they are packing to return home, Geldish holds up his hand and smiles an evil smile.

GELDISH

So we are clear, tell your warrens the final war is coming and The Brittle Riders are bringing it.

WELCOME TO ARRETI

NOTE: *This appendix contains all the brands which will appear throughout the trilogy, so some may not be represented in this script. Since the goal is to, eventually, put the entire trilogy on screen, I'm leaving this as is.*

All brands are human hybrids and omnivores. While many brands were designed to perform specific tasks, ranging from dangerous to tedious, others were simply aesthetically pleasing and created as toys or living statues. They were designed to be low-maintenance slave labor for a depleted human population.

All brands, however, were designed for speech, so they don't have long snouts or beaks and, instead, have mouths that, more or less, look human.

All brands were designed with enhanced immune systems and the ability to create embryonic stem cells in a specially designed organ that provided an unending supply of Telomerase enzymes to keep their bodies in peak condition. All brands had a built-in bio-bomb that would kill them ten years after decanting so that Rohta could continue to restock the same orders over and over. Their immune systems overcame the bio-bombs, and the brands called their triggering the "ten-year flu."

THE REOIONS

Children of the Waters - A collection of amphibian races who reside primarily on the west coast of the old United States. They also have crossed the Pacific to live on many islands. The most populous of the brand alliances, they adhere to a modified form of Buddhism. While not completely pacifists, they go out of their way to avoid conflict.

Dwellers of the Plains - A loose collection of brands who populate the area from east of the Mississippi River to Lake Michigan and from about middle Arkansas to the Canadian border. After the gen-O-pod war, they renounced technology and developed an agrarian lifestyle. Each Brand had its own military presence but had very few disputes between brands, so they were more ornamental than effective. Some brands believe in a deity but only in a casual manner.

Eastern Warrens - A diverse collection of brands that live from the Smokey Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean. They inhabit territory as far south as Miami and as far north as Newfoundland. After the gen-O-pod war, they picked and chose what technologies they wished to keep. While, in the main, they adopted an agrarian lifestyle, they kept a standing military and armed it with weapons made by the makers or weapons adapted from those to fit special needs. Their southern clans tend to be followers of Islam, but the rest take a more casual, slightly Gnostic approach to God.

Kalindor - A collection of reptiloid brands united under a single ruler called The Exalted. They live south of the Rio Grande all the way to Antarctica. They want all the technology the world offers but have been bred so that imaginative thought eludes them. Once something is explained to them, they understand it readily enough, but nothing comes to them originally. To get what they want, their Exalted have forced them to wage war, unsuccessfully, against the realm of Lord Südermann and the *Children of the Waters* for hundreds of suns. Their belief system is essentially neo-pagan. Their book of the five gods is part mysticism and part ecologically friendly, instruction manual.

Realm of Lord Südermann - A collection of insectoid races who live in the southern Mid-West of the old United States. Their territory covers from near the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi River. By far the most technologically advanced brand alliance, they salvaged as much infrastructure as possible after the gen-O-pod war and built on it. They adhere to a modified form of Christianity. They have a defined military with an elite guard, a regular army, and one militia sworn to Lord Südermann. Their policy for dealing with trespassers, until the final war with Xhaknar, was to put them to death and destroy the body.

THE BRANDS

Ant Person - Part fire ant, they averaged around 4½ feet in height and were bred to be desert espionage specialists. After the gen-O-pod war, they became severe isolationists who only would work with the Periplaneta brand (see below). Unlike ants, they do not have mandibles but very sensitive, silica-based body hair that can propel their bodies while prone and sense changes in the atmosphere that elude others. They also have multifaceted, insect-like eyes and can see in near darkness and in multiple, simultaneous directions. They prefer to wear full-body uniforms of nondescript colors.

Athabascae Warrior - Part buffalo, made by the New Sons of Freedom Militia to help protect their mountain compounds before the gen-O-pod war. They have shaggy body hair and tend toward dark colorings. They prefer clothing made from natural materials and tend to favor buckskins. They live close to nature and are excellent healers.

BadgeBeth - Part of various species of badger, they average around 5 feet in height or less. They have a mixed black and white coloring and are covered with light fur. They were designed to work exclusively with soil and were engineered to repel or attract the basic molecular structure of the natural ground. They tend to favor simple clothing decorated with small pieces of jewelry. They have razor-sharp talons and fear almost nothing. However, they were forced to live underground, or far from civilization, when Xhaknar attacked.

Chaldean - Part cow, they average around 5½ feet in height. They tend to have blotchy reddish-brown colorings with no fur. They were bred to be corporate functionaries but took up an agrarian lifestyle after the gen-O-pod war. Nonetheless, they do keep a small militia that serves the clan. They became followers of Allah before the gen-O-pod war and have retained that faith throughout, albeit with some discrepancies considering their genetic differences and fallacies told to them by their makers.

Columba - Part pigeon, averaging a little over 5 feet in height. They are gray with touches of white. Their heads bob when they walk, but they are almost matchless in the air. Despite all the makers' high-tech capabilities, they were designed to be messengers. They were a popular item purchased by wealthy people who felt they added the perfect level of secrecy to their long-distance conversations.

Cudas - Part barracuda, approximately 5 ½ feet tall, a mix of mottled brown and black coloring. They have small mouths with blade-sharp teeth. They were designed to be aqua assassins and tend to be very self-contained, to the point of annoyance, but are rabid believers in the ideals, if not always the practicalities, of the *Children of the Waters*.

Cyclops - Pure mutant, average around 7 feet in height, have bright yellow skin (which is mildly phosphorescent), and just one eye. Their eye can see the complete spectrum from X-rays to Infra-Red. They were built to work in dangerous mining situations and handle heavy objects with ease. A quirk in their design gave them eidetic memories and a deeply philosophical bend. Their philosophy includes the phrase: "Love everyone until they cross you, then kill them."

Din-La - Part rodent, probably rat, averaging around 4½ feet in height and are usually portly in adulthood. They are lightly furred, usually gray, and slightly nervous. They wear a uniform of a purple jacket and yellow pants, though they've never explained why. They are very good at keeping secrets and have a global subculture/trading network, which keeps them in the good graces of brands that would otherwise exterminate them.

Fierstan - Pure mutants, they were designed to be simple laborers. They have four powerful arms and well-muscled bodies. They average around 5½ feet in height and have bright red skin with dark patches under their eyes. Despite their intended breeding, they have keen intelligence and salvaged what technology they could after the gen-O-pod war. They built a powerful city within a fortress after the war and were the acknowledged leaders of the plains until Xhaknar came.

Grindle - Not an actual brand, but a creature created by Rohta for amusement. Part lizard, part bat with native intelligence and the ability to speak. While not intended by its makers, they developed sapience and can develop loyalties.

Haliaeetus - Part eagle, they were made by the New Sons of Freedom Militia to help protect their mountain compounds before the gen-O-pod war. They average around 5½ in height and are covered with white and brown feathers. They have large wings and can fly faster and farther than their genetic predecessors. They have keen eyesight and talons for fingers and toes. After the gen-O-pod war, they retreated to the mountains to live a primarily agrarian lifestyle.

Horun - Part falcon. They average around 3½ feet in height and are thin with very agile wings. They have 200/20 eyesight and were bred to be airborne spies. They were also quite facile at micro-processing and micro-manufacturing. They have talons instead of fingernails and can use them for delicate operations. They are uniformly ebony colored with blood-red wings and some red markings around their wrists and ankles. They have light down around their eyes, stretching across their necks and hiding their ears. They tend to wear dark-colored clothing and prefer lighter fabrics so they can be dressed while flying.

Human - Not technically a brand. They were the creators, or "makers," of all the brands. A race that was genetic cousins to apes and other primates, they lived on Earth and ruled over it due to their native intelligence and supposed superiority for approximately 12,000 years. The race began to die off when they were finally aware that they would be denied travel amongst the stars. This lack of human labor, combined with the need to maintain a certain lifestyle, led them to create genetic hybrids to do the work and/or fight for them. They called these hybrids gen-O-pods and divided them into trademarked brands.

Kgul - Pure mutant, inspired by the ancient tale of the Gollum. They are large clay-based creatures and were designed to provide manual labor for extended periods of time. Because they were difficult to make, they were created with the ability to survive almost any injury and to be able to regenerate body parts as needed. They are smarter and more resourceful than they look and are fiercely devoted to the *Rangka* (see below).

Kleknar - Pure mutant. No one has any idea what their inspiration was. They average around 3 feet tall, are pure white, and are almost perfectly round. They were designed to get into small places in mines and could swim surprisingly well. Developed with an ability to control autism, they have keen senses that they can enhance at will and are deadly shots. They also have a twisted sense of humor and the ability to turn almost anything into an explosive. If they open their senses up too much, they enter a sort of null state and need care for the rest of their lives.

Koi-San - Part koi, bred as decorative additions to large homes with pools or fountains. They average just under 5 feet tall and are covered with translucent scales of many colors which cover pale skin. They tend to be the more thoughtful members of the *Children of the Waters*. While they did fight in the gen-O-pod war, they've never taken up arms again.

Kwini-Laku - Part seal, they were the first Brand ever made by Edward Q. Rohta. They were designed for underwater research and to be able to go into areas that would be lethal to human divers. They are powerfully muscled and intelligent and averaging just over 5 feet in height. After the gen-O-pod war, they joined the *Children of the Waters* and set up small island communities around the Pacific Ocean.

LGX-117 - Part broad-snouted caiman, barely five feet in height, and have greenish, scaled skin with pale eyes. They are physically strong and smart enough for many tasks but lack originality. They were designed to survive in jungle environments and handle any assigned task, no matter the heat or the humidity.

Llamia - Part horse, part steer, part armadillo, averaging 7 feet in height and weighs around $\frac{1}{2}$ a ton. They have a human's torso, the horse's body, with the cloven hoofs of a steer with razor-sharp points and armadillo-esque armor that starts in the middle of their backs and then covers their entire rear loins and rump. They were designed to be a warrior breed that could haul supplies, fight close battles and survive harsh environments. Their skin color is as varied as the humans that were used for genetic source material, and they each have a mane that stretches down the middle of their torsos to the tip of their backs. Bred for intelligence and the ability to utilize many weapons, they were a major factor in the success of the gen-O-pod war. They wear clothing when they are in social situations or battle. Otherwise, they prefer to be nude.

Maker - See **Human** (above).

Mantis Warrior - Part mantis, averaging over 6 feet in height but tends to be thin. They have pea-green skin and small barbs on the backs of their legs. Extremely intelligent and resourceful, they were bred to work in arid environments and handle hazardous materials. They were sold mostly to oil and gas companies. After the gen-O-pod war, they relocated to North America and swore allegiance to the *Periplaneta* (see below).

Mayanoren - Part gorilla, averaging a little over 6 feet in height and extremely powerful. They have no body hair and mottled pink skin. They were designed to be infantry for a new world army by makers in competition with Rohta. They are, in the main, very stupid and require extensive explanations and training to accomplish any task beyond killing. However, killing is something they do well and with extreme gusto.

Minotaur - Part Toro Bravo, they were bred to be warriors and officers. Averaging over 6 feet in height, they are heavy, hoofed beings who have developed a deep, spiritual side while keeping all their warrior skills. They have deep reddish skin and powerful muscles. They favor simple clothing and live near a dormant volcano under the ground.

Named One - Smart *Mayanoren*. See "*Mayanoren*" (above) for more information.

Naradhama - *Fierstans* (see above) were captured and mutated by *Khaknar* into a servant class of warriors and sycophants.

Orcan - Part killer whale, they were designed to be security for several shipping companies. They never developed the true killer sense of their genetic predecessors and were scheduled for elimination around the time of the gen-O-pod war.

Despite that, they are powerful swimmers with large, finned feet and have skin coloring similar to their namesakes, a developed echolocation bulb on the front of their forehead, and a blowhole on the back of their neck.

Pan - Half goat, approximately 3½ to 4 feet tall, thin, and the males appear as traditional satyrs. Designed to be sex toys, primarily for rich Europeans, they have turned into a very divergent race that breeds everything from art masters to warriors. Because Rohta enjoyed the myth so much, he ensured that all the males were well endowed. Having no template for the females, he'd simply made them voluptuous. They all have pale white and auburn hair and green eyes. Their lower body fur is thick and colored the same as the hair on their heads, and they all have a curled white tail.

Periplaneta - Part cockroach is the only race that provides the Südermenn for the delta brands. They average 5 feet in height and have six arms and mandibles instead of mouths. They were designed to work in environments that would be lethal to humans, primarily radioactive and toxic. After the gen-O-pod war, they salvaged as much technology as possible and immediately set to recreate the infrastructure necessary to run it. Highly creative and resilient, they are extremely spiritual and follow an essentially Christian lifestyle. The various insectoid brands revere them.

QZD-1934 - Part chameleon, averaging less than five feet in height, weigh less than 100 lbs, and can alter their skin color to blend in with their surroundings. They were designed to be spies for various corporations and militaries. After the gen-O-pod war, they retreated to the southern continents and waited for a ruler to emerge.

Rangka - Wizards who had their flesh removed by a military-grade virus in the first battle with Xhaknar. Greatly debilitated in one way, they developed more enhanced powers over magnetism and powerful psychic sensitivity. See "Wizards" (below) for more information.

RZL-274 - Part flying lizard, averaging 5 feet in height with membranes that stretch from their wrists to their feet. They also have a stabilizing membrane between their legs. They are mottled yellow/green and have razor-sharp talons instead of fingers or toes. They were designed to work on top of the canopies in rainforests.

Se-Jeant - Pure mutant, averaging around 5½ feet in height, has gray/blue skin covered with similarly colored fur and tends to be thin. They have three round eyes and are designed to do specialized miniature work. Their long thin fingers, flat noses, and slits for mouths belie the fact that they are fierce warriors and cunning adversaries.

They developed an affinity for colder temperatures and lived further north than any other brand on the plains in a home they called The Ice Palace. While not literally made of ice, they do their best to keep the temperatures cool.

Snake-Man - Not a brand but a class of assassins created by Xhaknar and Yontar to act as spies. It is believed they were created through selective breeding and rude experimentation, but no records exist of the exact procedure used. They average around 3½ feet in height, have poisonous fangs, and lightly scaled skins. They serve when they feel like it and are loyal to no one. Very few exist due to these facts.

Sominid - Not a brand but an alien race who encountered humans long before the gen-O-pod war. Over 12 feet tall, mammalian, bipedal, with bright blue skin and white hair, they came to Earth for one reason: to party. Like good house guests anywhere, they brought their own brandy. Unlike good house guests, they destroyed the moon and killed tens of thousands of people. However, the incident was alcohol-related and not purposeful.

Succubus - Part bat, they average around 6 feet in height and are exclusively female. They have talons for toes and a spur on each heel for balance. They are partly metamorphic and can assume three basic forms; womyn, which resembles a human female except for their feet; mal, which resembles a human male except for the feet and has non-working genitalia; and their traditional form, which features large leathery wings. Their skin colorings represent all the former human races, and they have hairstyles that run the gamut from bald to lengthy locks. They prefer to be topless and wear only loincloths in the wild but can and will dress very elegantly when the situation demands it.

Super Soldier - Multiple genetic sources average around 7 feet in height and weigh over 300lbs. Made by the same makers who made the *Mayanoren*, they have faces that are exoskeletons and heavily muscled bodies covered in coarse, dark brown body hair. Some are military tacticians, and others are political leaders, and so on. They tend to be extremely intelligent but limited in scope. Nevertheless, those limitations do not lessen their deadliness.

Warters - Part warthog, averaging around 5 feet in height, are rotund and very strong. They have small tusks on their lower jaw that makes speech difficult. They are dark pink and tend to wear robes to hide as many weapons as possible. They were originally bred to be security for a specialized company no one remembers. After the gen-O-pod war, they turned to banditry and scattered across the North American continent.

White Teeth - Part Great White Shark, born to be pure warriors of the seas.

They were averaging around 6 feet in height with mottled white skin and a mouth that contained two sets of razor-sharp teeth, both top and bottom. They were given better eyesight than their genetic heirs and a better sense of perception. Vicious beyond belief, they were willing to kill any who crossed them. After the gen-O-pod wars, they joined the *Children of the Waters* and adopted their peace-oriented philosophies as best they could.

Wizard - Pure mutants. Ranging in height from 5 feet to 6½ feet tall, they had bright blue skin and varied body types. They were designed to use the forces of magnetism for mining and related duties. To accomplish this, the natural ionic currents in the human brain were enhanced on a geometric scale and controlled by a gland grafted into their frontal lobes. Their basic abilities allowed them to segregate metals from the ground, repel Earth's natural magnetism, and float a few feet above the planet. Because they were built to work in dangerous locales, they were given enhanced control over their alpha waves so they could communicate with each other, in case of danger, without the need for expensive electronic gear.

Wolfen - Part wolf, they average just under 6 feet in height. They were designed to be a forest-based warrior breed. They have tremendous strength, an increased sense of smell, and intense curiosity and intelligence. They tend to be covered in reddish brown fur and have slightly scalloped ears. They can cover great distances without any artificial aid and can learn to use any weapon within seconds. They prefer to live in packs and off the land. They were forced into hiding when Xhaknar attacked.

ANIMALS

Deisteed - About 20% larger than an average horse, they were designed to be work animals. They were used by wealthy landowners to show they were more in tune with nature than the robot users.

Kgum - Think of an ugly cross between a cow and a water buffalo. They provide meat, wool, hides, and crude labor. They replaced domestic cows that died off due to an inability to breed independently.

Narkling - Approximately 8 to 10 feet tall with six legs and a segmented body covered in thick, dark fur. They have razor-sharp teeth that can rotate inside their mouths. They will eat anything or anyone. They were designed to be mining machines but were too deadly to keep around. The makers dumped them in an abandoned forest in the Midwest and forgot about them.

Nysteed - The only Brand created exclusively by a brand. Originally bred to help the Wizards explore their world, they became the elite war horses of the plains after Xhaknar came. A horse-like animal, slightly larger than a deisteed, can run vast distances at full speed and carry heavy loads if need be. They are shaggy, with dark coats, and have flames instead of eyes.

Pit person - Mildly humanoid, less than 2 feet tall, and thin. They are non-sapient and fearful of almost everything. They were designed to be helpers and companions for children, but they never worked out.

Quizzle bird - Think of a parrot on acid, and you get the idea. A riot of colors, averaging around 5 pounds, they are very large and very stupid. Rohta just thought they were fun, so he made a lot of them.

Rakyeen - A six-legged creature, averaging about 6 feet in height and around 12 feet long, they are furry mutants designed to be draft animals. They are good but gamey eating and do not take well to domestication.

Sna-Ahd weasel - Not actually a weasel, more like a long-necked rat. Mostly they have sex and live underground. They were supposed to process soil like earthworms, leaving it aerated and filled with nutrients. They were an early experiment by Rohta that escaped before he could finish their line.

Steed - About $\frac{3}{4}$ the size of an average horse, they were designed to run very fast for short distances, although they could carry a rider a long distance at a comfortable trot. The makers used them to patrol their estates and impress their neighbors.

TERMS

Arreti - Earth

Brand - artificially created sentient life form

Breaklight - dawn

Clik - approximately one hour

Dark Sun - winter

Dim Sun - fall

Epi-clik - approximately one minute

Even - night

Even-fall - dusk

Even-split - Approximately midnight

Full Sun (*sometimes just Sun or Suns in the plural*)-
approximately 365 turns (see below)

Goldens - money

Good Sun - summer

Kay- approximately 1.246 miles / 2.005 kilometers. Arreti has
a circumference of 20,000 kays.

Maker - human

Mid-break - when the sun is highest in the sky

Pod - see Brand

Small- child

Sepi-clip - approximately one second

Turn - One planetary revolution or day

Warm Sun- spring

Youngling - pre-teen to teenaged Brand